DIASPORA IN THE MENA REGION AND BEYOND

Aditya Anshu (Ed)

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Diaspora in the MENA Region and Beyond

Aditya Anshu

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Series Foreword

Prof Victoria Graham
University of Johannesburg
Co-Series Editor: *African Political Science and International Relations in Focus*

While there is considerable literature on migration from and within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, particularly due to conflict (for example, Syrian refugees), the long-term political and socio-economic roles of these diasporas in both host and home countries have been less frequently examined. Moreover, Diaspora Studies within the MENA context is an emerging field but remains less developed compared to other regions. The political, cultural, economic, and social impacts of MENA diasporas are gaining interest, but wide-ranging and thought-provoking case studies are still relatively few and far between, particularly those that are a testament to the complexity and richness of the diasporic journey.

We are therefore pleased to present this book – '*Diaspora in the MENA Region and Beyond*' – a collection that delves deep into the myriad facets of diaspora experiences in the MENA region from the historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts that have shaped the MENA diaspora through to gender dynamics and diplomacy.

The book is part of the *African Political Science and International Relations in Focus* book series, published by UJ Press. This new book series was introduced to further dialogue with the African continent, calling attention to a vast array of political phenomena which require innovative approaches to some pressing and under-researched topics in the African context. On one hand, Africa is a hub of innovation, diplomatic achievements, indigenous wisdom, resilience, and self-determination. On the other hand, the continent faces challenges such as instability, conflict, social

injustice, political corruption, weak political institutions, geopolitical struggles, and environmental degradation. These contrasting yet coexisting realities necessitate a thorough examination of Africa's historical, current, and future political landscapes. *African Political Science and International Relations in Focus* serves as a platform for African scholars, Afro-centric scholars, scholars in the African diaspora, early-career scholars and students both from Africa and interested in Africa's affairs to showcase their work and glean new insights on security issues, conflict management, diplomacy, foreign policy, international organisations, Africa's international political economy, African agency, the international citizenship of African states and Africa's relationship with international law, good governance, electoral processes, active citizenship and sustainable development among other areas of study in Political Science and International Relations.

There is no doubt that the diaspora plays a multifaceted and significant role in shaping the political, economic, and social landscapes of their countries of origin. Their contributions help to, *inter alia*, foster development, support democratic processes, and enhance international relations, making them indispensable actors in African politics and beyond. *'Diaspora in the MENA Region and Beyond'* is a rich and compelling contribution to the above. Diasporas have long been the silent threads weaving the rich and intricate fabric of the MENA region with its unique historical, political, and cultural contexts. Through its 14 thoughtfully crafted chapters, this book offers a comprehensive exploration of the myriad aspects of diasporas, delving into the complexities of identity, migration, diplomacy, finance, and cultural exchange.

The journey begins with an introductory chapter that sets the stage, highlighting the multifaceted nature of MENA diasporas and their significant contributions to the region. It frames the subsequent discussions, guiding readers through the intricate processes of identity navigation, gender dynamics

in migration, and the socio-economic impacts of diasporic movements.

In Chapter 2, the focus on navigating identities reveals the transnational struggles and triumphs of individuals and communities as they seek belonging and self-definition. The gendered experiences of the North African diaspora are brought to light in Chapter 3, providing fresh perspectives on women's unique challenges and contributions. Chapters 4 through 7 delve deeper into the lived experiences of diaspora communities, from the impact of male migration on left-behind women in India to the financial bonds that connect diasporic communities with their homelands. These chapters unpack the processes shaping migrant identities and explore how diasporas function as bridges for peace and diplomacy in the MENA region.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s strategic use of soft power and tolerance is examined in Chapter 8, highlighting a successful model of peaceful amalgamation of diverse diasporas. The multicultural approach of the Indian diaspora in the UAE, explored in Chapter 9, provides insights into how diasporic communities negotiate their identities and interact with local media.

Chapters 10 and 11 offer poignant reflections on the roots of identity within Indian and Pakistani diasporas and the social networks of Kerala migrant care workers in Israel. These narratives highlight the memories, histories, and social structures that shape diasporic lives. The dynamic role of the Indian diaspora in shaping India-Middle East relations is the focus of Chapter 12, underscoring the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of this influence. Chapter 13 continues this exploration, illustrating the cultural export of Indian cinema and its impact on the Middle Eastern cultural landscape.

The book concludes with Chapter 14, offering a compelling investigation into the diverging political aspirations of the Kurdish diaspora. This chapter encapsulates the complexities of diaspora engagement in regional politics, providing a fitting end to this comprehensive exploration.

In a world where borders are increasingly permeable and identities are ever evolving, '*Diaspora in the MENA Region and Beyond*' offers invaluable insights into the past, present, and future of diasporic communities. It is more than a collection of academic insights on a vastly interesting and complex region of the world – it is a tribute to the resilience and dynamism of diasporic communities and a timely and indispensable contribution to the wider scholarship on migration.

Foreword

Movement and dispersal of people in the neighbourhood and beyond is historical. This phenomenon of movement, displacement and dispersal, whether voluntary or forced, received academic attention after the first and second world wars. There had been a growing engagement of the historian, anthropologist and sociologist to understand this international migrant community within the state structure. Globalisation brought altogether a new focus on this international migrant, covered under the broad term of the Diasporas. They were seen as one of the mega drivers of globalisation. They were connecting countries both in spoke and wheel relationship between home and that of countries of their adoption as well as in a web relationship where they were seen as a catalyst for globalisation. The ethnic/regional/cultural identities of these international migrants, in contrast to the cold war period, were no longer seen as divisive, parochial or centrifugal. Diasporic identity was seen as intrinsic and something to be acknowledged and harnessed. Diasporic communities in this context emerged as a strategic resource, spurring countries to become globalised. It was useful to connect with their country of origin and to utilise this connection for national development and foreign policy objectives. This new strength of the Diaspora became a subject of multidisciplinary studies where economists, international relational researchers, lawyers and strategic studies scholars engaged with how to harness this resource. Many countries used not only their Diaspora abroad as an asset but focused on Diasporas within for their national and international objectives. Simultaneously, this strength of Diasporic linkages sometimes became liabilities, leading to secessionist threats. Therefore, Diaspora studies were no longer confined to literature, anthropology, or sociology alone.

The current book on *Diasporas in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)* is very relevant for emerging multidisciplinary Diaspora studies. The region itself has settled or long-

term international migrants; Diasporas from neighbouring regions to Diasporas from distant places; Diasporas with the same ethnic/religious/cultural identity as that of natives, to Diasporas having a distinct and divergent ethnic/linguistic identity. The number of these Diasporic communities and their role in economic development is substantial. Their concerns and contributions require academic and research output to understand them and their potential to serve the domestic and foreign objectives of the host countries as well as those of world community.

The book has varied contributions from different disciplines and from practitioners, highlighting the multiple issues of the Diasporic communities within the MENA region. There are regional as well global researchers taking up these issues, which are visible or dormant, by presenting both broad and focused views on the Diasporic communities.

I find this book addresses a major gap in the understanding of the Diasporic minorities in the region, which play a significant role and have the potential to contribute to the economic, diplomatic and strategic needs of these countries. In my opinion, the book will contribute to the growing efforts of the MENA countries to address the divergent needs of these valuable communities and enable the Diasporas within to contribute more to the region. I appreciate the effort of its editor Dr Aditya Anshu to put together such a divergent and global scholarship to bring out this book. I am sure this work will be useful not only for academic and policy practitioners, but also to the general public who would like to know more about the presence of divergent communities in a region that apparently looks monolithic.

Best Wishes!!

Prof Ajay Dubey

Professor, School of International Studies, JNU &
Former Rector (Pro-Vice Chancellor)
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Map of the Middle East

Source: https://gisgeography.com/middle-east-map/

Middle East Vocabulary

Landlocked – has no seacoast/surrounded by land

Underground aquifers – layers of underground rock where water runoff from rains and streams is trapped

Fossil water – water that has been underground for centuries

Drip irrigation – using computers that measure out how much water each plant receives

Desalination – process of removing salt and other chemicals from sea water

Hydroelectric power – electricity produced from the energy of running water

OPEC – Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries: Oil-rich countries that combine to have more control over the price of oil on the world market

Bedouins – desert nomads; an Arab ethnocultural group, descended from nomads who have historically inhabited the Arabian and Syrian Deserts

Qanats – underground tunnels that bring water from hills to dry plains

Subsistence agriculture – growing small amount of crops for the local people

Afghanistan – landlocked country located at the far eastern region of SW Asia, very mountainous

Israel – a country, created by the United Nations, that lies on the Mediterranean Sea

Iran – also known as Persia, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a country in Western Asia Iraq – this country borders Jordan, Syria, and Iran

Turkey – located to the north and west of Iraq, this nation is the country where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers begin

Saudi Arabia – the largest county on the Arabian Peninsula

Suez Canal – an artificial waterway in Egypt extending from Port Said to Suez and connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea

Persian Gulf – An extension of the Indian Ocean (Gulf of Oman) through the Strait of Hormuz; it lies between Iran to the northeast and the Arabian Peninsula to the southwest

Jordan River – river in West Asia flowing to the Dead Sea, important in Christianity

Asia Tigris – the eastern member of the two great rivers that define Mesopotamia

Strait of Hormuz – the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean

Arabian Sea – a region of the northern Indian Ocean bounded on the north by Pakistan and Iran, on the west by northeastern Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula, and on the east by India

Author Biographies

Dr Aditya Anshu currently serves as *faculty of International Relation at Abu Dhabi University*. His domain expertise is Diaspora and International Studies. He has earned his Doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) from prestigious School of International Studies, JNU. He earned fellowship from with HUFS South Korea and ICSSR, India. He has also worked with EOI, Washington DC, USA. National Investigation Agency, Govt. of India, and Bennett University. Currently he is on-board of many Q1indexed Journals. Also, he is editing a book series with Palgrave Macmillan and Taylor and Francis.

Lailla Bal'Mahdi Drawing from her expertise in Human Resources, Lailla has garnered valuable experience working with various renowned global brands and corporations. Professionally established as an accomplished Independent Employment Law Consultant specializing in conflict resolution and negotiation, she focuses on mitigating tribunal claims arising from workplace violations. Lailla holds degrees from the University of Westminster and the University of Brighton, UK. Additionally, she is an Associate Masters graduate of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). With a strong advocacy for Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS) practices, she is committed to promoting fair and just outcomes for breaches in employment rights. Beyond the realm of employment law, Lailla actively supports the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with a particular emphasis on the 'Question of Palestine'. Central to her mission is the effort to increase awareness of diaspora stories and confront prevailing unjustified narratives that are often directed against indigenous native communities.

Prof Aditi Chatterjee is Assistant Professor in International Relations at the Abu Dhabi University, Military Program. Her research interests relate to foreign policy, international migration, nuclear security, counterterrorism and security politics in Middle East and South-Asia. She has previously

worked as Assistant Professor and Program Head of the Department of International Relations and History at IILM University in Gurgaon, India. She received her PhD in International Politics from Jawaharlal Nehru University in India.

Dr. Shalini Mittal is an Indian academician who earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from Banaras Hindu University, India. She is currently working as a faculty of Psychology in the School of Liberal Arts, Bennett University. Dr. Mittal's research area centres on psychosocial perspectives related to gender and social minorities, with a particular emphasis on trauma and gender-based violence, including issues affecting acid attack victims. Trained in the skill of interviewing victims of crime, she aims to amplify the voices and impact of victims and gender minorities through her research work.

Prof Michael O. Slobodchikoff is the author of several peer-reviewed publications and of four books. His most recent book is India as Kingmaker (with Dr. Aakriti A. Tandon). His first book, entitled Strategic Cooperation: Overcoming the Barriers of Global Anarchy was published in 2013, and his next second book, entitled Building Hegemonic Order Russia's Way: Rules, Stability and predictability Predictability in the Post-Soviet Space, was published in 2014. His book, Cultural Imperialism and the Decline of the Liberal Order: Russian and Western Soft Power in Eastern Europe is coauthored with G. Doug Davis. He has also edited two volumes: The Challenge to NATO and a forthcoming book, US Global Leadership: Ailing US Diplomacy and Solutions for the Twenty-First Century (with G. Doug Davis). Dr. Slobodchikoff is the leading expert on treaty networks and the use of network analysis on treaties in explaining the creation of global and regional order. He specializes in relations between Russia and the former Soviet states, international conflict and peace, security, and comparative politics. He is a regular contributor to Russia Direct, and has often served as an analyst on Russian relations with Ukraine for BBC World News as well as Al Asharq and Al Qahera News.

Prof G. Doug Davis is a professor of political science at Troy University, USA. He is the author of four books on Eastern Europe and Eurasia and a forthcoming book on American diplomacy titled American Global Leadership: Ailing US Diplomacy and Solutions for the Twenty-First Century. His work has been translated into nine languages. He has international development experience in the Middle East and is a frequent guest on international television. He hosts the International Insights television program with Dr Slobodchikoff. He has national editorials in Newsweek and Real Clear Defense and appears regularly on NPR.

Duha Lababidi, a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, serves as a Senior Instructor at Abu Dhabi University's College of Arts and Sciences, bringing over a decade of teaching experience in Arabic, Islamic culture, and humanities courses. Ms. Lababidi coordinates the Academic Success Center at Abu Dhabi University, organizing events and workshops to support student success and holistic development. Recognized for her adaptability and flexibility, she fosters a nurturing learning environment, promoting positive interactions among students and colleagues. Ms. Lababidi integrates innovative lesson planning and technology to enhance student engagement and academic performance. Her research interests include cultural issues, technology-based learning, student retention, and motivation.

Deenaz Kanji is a seasoned and skilled educator with over 30 years of experience in the education sector, in tertiary education as well as education program management. Currently, she holds both administrative, as well as academic responsibilities with the College of Arts and Sciences at Abu Dhabi University. Between 2018 and 2022, she served as the Coordinator of the Academic Success Center on Al Ain Campus, where she played a pivotal role in expanding its scope and impact. Together with the Coordinator of the Academic Success Center in Abu Dhabi Campus, we transformed the reach of the Academic Success Center, such that it plays an important role in helping students, regardless of their major, to achieve their academic goals. In 2021, she

earned her Fellowship at Advance HE, UK, underscoring my commitment to professional development. Moreover, in 2020, during the pandemic, Ms. Kanji completed a certification in higher education teaching with Harvard University's Bok Center for Teaching and Learning.

Dr. Pooja Kapoor is a distinguished academician currently serving as an Associate Professor at the School of Liberal Arts – Bennett University, Greater Noida. A trailblazer in her educational pursuits, Dr Kapoor earned her B.A. (Hons.) in Political Science from Gargi College, Delhi University, where she secured the first rank. She further expanded her academic horizon by completing her M.A. in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her scholarly contributions reached their pinnacle with a doctoral research focus on "Violation of Human Rights: Case Study of Custodial Violence in Delhi," culminating in the award of a Ph.D. from Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi in 2004. Dr Kapoor's commitment to academic excellence extends beyond her research achievements. Dr Kapoor's intellectual contributions extend to the realm of published works, with several books credited to her name for various universities such as Jamia Millia Islamia University, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, and SRM University. She has an active record of publications in the area of international relations, gender studies, public policies etc. Her research interest lies in the area of geopolitical studies, gender and politics.

Dr.Shabista Naz is a researcher and academician affiliated with Conflict Research Consulting and Advocacy (CRCA), Nigeria, as a Research Associate. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Area Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has prolific publications in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, Dr. Naz is a seasoned participant in international seminars and conferences. Driven by an unwavering passion for gender equality, Dr. Naz is committed to effecting positive change and bridging societal divides through her work. Her research and activism converge seamlessly, with a focus on fostering inclusivity, amplifying marginalised voices, and challenging entrenched systemic

inequalities. With an interdisciplinary approach, she endeavours to elevate scholarship and champion the cause of building a more inclusive, just, and equitable world.

Dr. Nilanjana Nayak is an academic and scholar, serving as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Sitanand College, Nandigram, West Bengal, India. Dr. Nayak has an academic background with PhD in International Relations from Vidyasagar University, India; MPhil in international relations from Jadavpur University, India, LLB in Utkal University, India. Dr. Nayak has a professional experience as a lawyer in Kolkata High Court.

Sharon Susan Koshy is a PhD candidate at the Australian National University, working on temporary migration, gender, and development. She holds an MPhil degree from the University of Hyderabad and a Master's degree from the Central University of Kerala. She previously worked as a Research Associate with the Centre for Public Policy Research, Kochi, where she led the International Relations and geopolitics verticals. Sharon is passionate about the gender dimensions of public and foreign policy. She produces and hosts the Southbound podcast series where she discusses gender mainstreaming from a South global perspective with experts in domains such as foreign policy, International relations, foreign trade, climate change, etc. During her research experience at IIT-Madras and the University of Hyderabad, she worked with international communities of Tibetan refugees and Egyptian feminist CSOs, to gather primary and secondary data. She also has extensive field experience with Tibetans in exile in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. Sharon has participated in several roundtable conferences and panel discussions at national and regional levels organised by universities and consulates. She is an Indo-Pacific Circle member and contributes to newspapers like The Daily Guardian, Live Mint, and Financial Express.

Sakshi Mathur is a doctoral scholar in psychology at Bennett University, Greater Noida, India. Their research focuses on the intersection of trauma, social-emotional learning, and stigma

in children of incarcerated mothers. Sakshi's work aims to shed light on the unique challenges faced by this population and contribute to the development of support systems that foster resilience and well-being.

Alik Naha serves as a faculty member at the Department of Political Science, Vidyasagar College, Kolkata. His research interests encompass a range of areas such as Indian Foreign Policy, Indian Maritime Policy & Security, Indo-Pacific studies, and India-Japan relations. He has contributed significantly to these research areas, with extensive publications in the form of more than fifteen book chapters featured in edited volumes by both nationally and internationally renowned publishers, as well as twenty articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Brahmneet Kaur Narula is currently working as a GSOC Operative at the London Stock Exchange Group. She has a postgraduate degree in Geopolitics and International Relations from the Manipal Academy of Higher Education. She has previously interned at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. Her areas of interest include Middle Eastern and North African Geopolitics, Conflict Management and Security Studies.

Arushi Singh has a master's in Geopolitics and International Relations. She has domain experience in the geopolitics of West Asia, the geopolitical implications of great power competition in Africa, Russia's foreign policy orientations, and emerging technologies. She currently serves as a researcher at the Consortium of Indo-Pacific Researchers and a geopolitical risk analyst for a private consulting firm based in the Middle East.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Exploring the Diaspora in the MENA Region: A Multifaceted Journey

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In Memory of Nana Baba

Abstract

The introductory chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the diaspora phenomenon in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond. Delving into the intricacies of this multifaceted journey, the chapter elucidates the historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts that have shaped the MENA diaspora. By tracing the trajectories of individuals and communities who have traversed borders in search of opportunities and refuge, the chapter underscores the region's dynamic interplay of migration, identity, and global interconnectedness. As the repercussions of the diaspora reverberate across a spectrum of spheres, including economics and cultural dynamics, this introductory chapter lays the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of the diverse dimensions characterising the MENA diaspora experience. The diaspora's impact resonates across diverse sectors, from economics to culture, and this chapter provides a foundational framework for the ensuing study of the MENA diaspora's manifold dimensions.

The MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region stands at the crossroads of history, culture, and civilization, bearing witness to the movement of peoples, ideas and aspirations

across its diverse landscapes. Central to this intricate tapestry is the phenomenon of diaspora, a concept that encapsulates the dispersion of populations from their ancestral homelands to various corners of the world. This introductory chapter lays the foundation for a comprehensive exploration of the diaspora in the MENA region, shedding light on its historical roots, contemporary manifestations and profound impacts on both the host societies and the countries of origin. As we embark on this journey through the diaspora in the MENA region, it becomes evident that the movement of people across borders has woven a rich tapestry of interconnectedness, resilience and transformation. This book seeks to unravel the intricate narratives that define the MENA diaspora, shedding light on its multifaceted dimensions and its lasting influence on both the homeland and the wider world.

The term "diaspora" typically refers to a scattered population with a common origin, often originating from a specific region or country and settling in different parts of the world. In the context of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, there are several significant diasporas with their own unique histories, experiences, and contributions. Here are a few notable examples:

Classification of Diasporas in the MENA Region

The MENA region hosts a diverse tapestry of diaspora communities, each shaped by unique historical circumstances. The Armenian Diaspora emerged from the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide during World War I, dispersing Armenians to countries like Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Egypt. Despite their displacement, these communities have resiliently preserved their cultural identity and enriched their host societies. The Palestinian Diaspora, a consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has scattered Palestinian communities across the MENA region, leading to challenges in terms of rights and living conditions. Meanwhile, Lebanon boasts a substantial diaspora, contributing to global economic development and cultural exchange in countries like Brazil, the United States,

Canada, Australia, and West Africa. The Syrian Diaspora has surged due to ongoing conflicts, with Syrians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries and beyond, grappling with issues of displacement and cultural preservation. Iraq and Iran also harbor sizable diaspora communities, with Iranians establishing strong connections to their heritage in the West, while Iraqis have formed communities in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Egyptians have dispersed globally for economic, educational, and political reasons, with significant communities in the Gulf countries, Europe, and North America, contributing to various fields. These diaspora narratives underscore the complexity of their dynamics, reflecting unique stories, challenges, and enduring contributions to both host countries and countries of origin.

Unpacking the Concept of Diaspora Theories:

"Diaspora theories" refers to a set of conceptual frameworks and approaches used to understand and analyse the experiences, movements, and identities of diaspora communities. A diaspora typically refers to a scattered population with a common origin or heritage who have spread out to various locations around the world. Scholars and researchers from various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, and more, have developed different theories to explore the dynamics and implications of diaspora communities. Some of the prominent diaspora theories include:

- **Push-Pull Theory:** This theory focuses on the factors that "push" people to leave their homeland (push factors) and the factors that "pull" them toward a new destination (pull factors). It considers economic, social, political, and cultural motivations for migration.
- **Transnationalism:** Transnationalism emphasizes the connections and interactions between the homeland and the diaspora, rather than viewing them as separate entities. It recognizes the ongoing relationships, exchanges, and identities that exist across borders.

- **Homeland-Diaspora Relations:** This theory examines the interactions, tensions, and collaborations between the diaspora and the homeland. It explores how diaspora communities maintain ties to their place of origin and how these ties impact both the diaspora and the homeland.
- **Cultural Hybridity:** Cultural hybridity theory focuses on the blending and mixing of cultures as diaspora communities interact with their host societies. It highlights the creation of new cultural norms and identities as a result of this interaction.
- **Identity and Belonging:** Diaspora theories often address questions of identity, belonging, and cultural preservation. They explore how diaspora communities negotiate their sense of self in relation to their homeland and host society.
- **Return Migration:** Some diaspora theories examine the phenomenon of return migration, where members of the diaspora choose to go back to their homeland. This can have various social, economic, and cultural implications.
- **Globalisation and Diaspora:** Globalisation has influenced the movement and interconnectedness of diaspora communities. Some theories analyse how globalisation shapes diasporic experiences and identities. It is important to note that these theories are not mutually exclusive, and researchers often combine multiple approaches to gain a deeper understanding of diaspora communities. Additionally, the field of diaspora studies continues to evolve, with new theories and perspectives emerging over time.

Diaspora Studies is also an interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on the experiences, identities, and cultural, social, and political dynamics of diasporic communities. A diaspora refers to a dispersed population that shares a common heritage, culture, or origin and is typically spread across different regions or countries. Diaspora Studies seeks to understand the complexities of these communities, their histories, migration

patterns, and their interactions with both their host societies and their places of origin.

Variations in Diaspora Experiences, Key Concepts and Themes in Diaspora Studies:

Migration and displacement are pivotal themes in the study of diaspora, encapsulating the journeys of communities originally rooted in a specific homeland that have undergone migration or faced displacement, scattering across various corners of the globe. The multifaceted exploration of diasporas involves delving into the underlying causes, intricate processes, and far-reaching effects of these movements, shedding light on the profound impact of displacement on individuals and the communities they form. Moreover, diasporic communities find themselves grappling with profound questions of identity and belonging, as members navigate the complex tapestry of multiple identities, including their ethnic, national, and host country affiliations. In the realm of Diaspora Studies, scholars explore the nuanced ways in which individuals construct and negotiate their identities in the face of migration, often adapting to and embracing diverse cultural contexts. This intricate interplay between migration, displacement and identity shapes the rich tapestry of diasporic experiences, offering insights into the intricate dynamics of human movement and cultural adaptation. Diaspora communities frequently engage in cultural exchanges and interactions between their host countries and places of origin. This results in the creation of hybrid cultural expressions that blend elements from different traditions.

Diasporic communities intricately weave the fabric of memory and nostalgia, maintaining profound connections to their places of origin through cherished recollections, narratives, and a commitment to preserving cultural heritage. The longing for the homeland and the preservation of identity become integral components of diasporic existence. Within these communities, tight-knit networks emerge, providing invaluable support, shared experiences, and a

sense of belonging for newcomers navigating unfamiliar environments. Beyond personal connections, many diaspora communities actively engage in political activism, advocating for human rights, social justice, and political change both in their host countries and places of origin. Scholars also explore the pivotal role of diasporas in contributing to the development of their countries of origin through remittances, investments and various forms of support. Additionally, the representation of diasporic experiences is profoundly shaped by media, including literature, film, and cultural expressions, as scholars in Diaspora Studies analyse how these mediums reflect, challenge, or reshape diasporic identities. The interdisciplinary nature of Diaspora Studies intersects with postcolonial studies and globalisation, offering a nuanced exploration of the legacies of colonialism, the complexities of migration, and the profound impacts of an interconnected global landscape.

Intersectionality considers how factors such as gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect with diasporic experiences, influencing individuals' identities and opportunities. Diaspora Studies is a dynamic and evolving field that draws on insights from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies, literature, political science and more. Researchers in this field aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the diverse and intricate experiences of diaspora communities and their interactions with the wider world.

Historical Context and Migration Waves

The MENA region has a rich history of migrations, influenced by a complex interplay of factors such as political, economic, social, and environmental changes. Migration waves in the MENA region have been shaped by both voluntary and forced movements, often reflecting the region's geopolitical dynamics. Here follows an overview of some key historical contexts and migration waves in the MENA region:

The history of the MENA region is marked by a tapestry of migrations and upheavals that have shaped its cultural and geopolitical landscape. Serving as one of the cradles of human civilisation, the region witnessed early human migrations within and across territories, giving rise to ancient civilisations like Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley. The Ottoman Empire's centuries-long domination and the subsequent colonial period, characterized by European powers exerting control, brought about significant population movements and displacements, including Jewish migration to Palestine, setting the stage for the establishment of Israel. The enduring Israeli–Palestinian conflict has led to multiple waves of displacement, creating refugee populations in neighbouring countries. The discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE fueled labour migration from countries like Egypt and Yemen. The Lebanese Civil War prompted emigration for safety, fostering diasporas in the Americas, Europe, and Australia. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 led to political turmoil and mass emigration, with Iranians seeking refuge in the United States, Canada and Europe. These historical migrations collectively contribute to the region's complex narrative of movement, adaptation and cultural exchange.

The Gulf War (1990–1991) and subsequent conflicts in Iraq have instigated extensive internal displacement and compelled migrations to neighbouring states, with the 2003 Iraq War exacerbating these trends. The Syrian Civil War, commencing in 2011, has unleashed one of the most sizable and intricate displacement crises in recent history, prompting millions of Syrians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and beyond. The ongoing conflict in Yemen has given rise to a severe humanitarian crisis, leading to internal displacement and spurring others to seek refuge in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

North African countries, notably Libya and Tunisia, have experienced diverse migration dynamics, marked by economic migration to Europe and displacement arising from conflicts. In addition to traditional drivers, environmental factors like water scarcity and desertification have played a significant

role in fostering internal and cross-border migration within the region. These migration waves have given rise to complex diaspora communities, fostering cultural exchanges while simultaneously posing challenges for both host and origin countries. The intricate history of migrations in the MENA region is intricately woven into its political, social and economic fabric, with these dynamics continuing to evolve in the contemporary landscape.

Ancient Migrations and Trade Routes

The MENA region has a rich history of ancient migrations and trade routes that played a crucial role in shaping the cultural, economic, and political landscape of the area. These migrations and trade routes facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, technologies and cultures across vast distances. Here are some of the notable ancient migrations and trade routes in the MENA region:

- **Incense Route:** The Incense Route was a network of ancient trade routes that connected the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the southern regions like Yemen and Oman, to the Mediterranean world. This route facilitated the trade of valuable commodities such as frankincense, myrrh, spices, and other luxury goods. The cities of Petra in modern-day Jordan and Palmyra in Syria were important stops along this route.
- **Silk Road**: While the Silk Road is often associated with Central Asia and China, its western branch extended into the MENA region. It connected China to the Mediterranean, passing through parts of Iran, Iraq, and Anatolia (modern-day Turkey). This route facilitated the exchange of silk, textiles, spices, precious metals, and cultural ideas between the East and West.
- **Phoenician Maritime Trade:** The Phoenicians, an ancient maritime civilization based in present-day Lebanon and coastal areas of Syria, were renowned for their seafaring skills and trade networks. They established colonies and trading posts across the

Mediterranean, contributing to the diffusion of goods and cultures between the MENA region and other parts of the ancient world.

- **Trans-Saharan Trade Routes:** While the bulk of the Trans-Saharan trade routes extended across North and West Africa, they also connected with the southern regions of the MENA region, such as Sudan and parts of Egypt. These routes facilitated the trade of goods like gold, salt, textiles and slaves between the Saharan and sub-Saharan regions.
- **Indian Ocean Trade:** The Indian Ocean served as a major maritime trade route connecting the MENA region to the Indian subcontinent, East Africa and Southeast Asia. Ports along the coasts of modern-day Yemen, Oman and the Persian Gulf were crucial nodes in this network, facilitating the exchange of spices, textiles, ceramics and cultural influences.
- **Nabatean Trade Routes:** The Nabateans, an ancient Arab civilization centred around Petra in modern-day Jordan, controlled key trade routes that connected the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean and beyond. Their control over these routes brought wealth and cultural interactions to their region.
- **Caravan Routes:** Throughout the MENA region, ancient caravan routes criss-crossed deserts and mountains, connecting oases and trading centres. These routes were essential for the movement of goods and people, and they played a vital role in the economic and cultural exchanges of the time.
- **Migration of Peoples:** In addition to trade, various ancient civilizations in the MENA region experienced migrations of peoples due to conquests, invasions and other factors. These migrations led to the spread of cultural practices, languages and technologies. These ancient migrations and trade routes demonstrate the region's historical significance as a crossroads of civilizations and a hub of economic and cultural interactions. The legacy of these routes can still be seen

in the architecture, languages and cultural practices of the modern MENA region.

Colonial Era and Labour Migration

The Colonial Era and Labour Migration in the MENA region are significant historical and socio-economic phenomena that have had lasting impacts on the region's development, demographics and cultural dynamics. The colonial era in the MENA region refers to the period during which various European powers established colonial rule and dominance over different parts of the region. This era began in the 19th century and extended into the mid-20th century. Some of the key colonial powers in the region were France, Britain, Italy and Spain. Colonial powers often sought to exploit the region's resources, establish trade routes and exert political control. This often involved restructuring local economies, introducing new administrative systems and sometimes altering borders to suit their interests. The colonial period had profound impacts on the social, economic and political landscapes of the MENA region.

- **Labour Migration in the MENA Region:** Labour migration in the MENA region has been a recurring phenomenon for centuries. Economic opportunities, as well as political and social factors, have driven people to move within and beyond the region in search of work and better livelihoods. This migration has taken various forms, including internal rural-to-urban migration, as well as international migration to countries in Europe and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.
- **Labour Migration in the Colonial Context:** During the colonial era, labour migration was often driven by the need for workforces in various sectors, such as agriculture, construction and infrastructure development. Colonial powers brought in labourers from other parts of their empires or from neighbouring regions to work on projects that served the interests of the colonial administration. This led to the movement of

people across borders and contributed to the mixing of cultures and ethnicities.

- **Modern Labour Migration Trends:** In the modern era, labour migration in the MENA region has continued, with some distinct trends:
- **Gulf Countries:** The GCC countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman) have been major destinations for labour migrants from countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and various African nations. The GCC countries have experienced rapid economic development fueled by oil wealth, leading to a demand for foreign labour in sectors like construction, domestic work and services.
- **Economic Reasons:** High unemployment rates in some MENA countries, coupled with economic disparities, have driven people to seek better opportunities abroad. Remittances sent back to home countries by migrant workers play a crucial role in the economies of many nations. Labour migration also comes with challenges such as the mistreatment of migrant workers, issues related to human rights, and the kafala (sponsorship) system prevalent in some Gulf countries, which ties a worker's legal status to their employer.
- **Social and Cultural Impact:** Migration has contributed to the multicultural makeup of the region, with diverse communities coexisting. However, it has also raised questions about integration, assimilation and cultural preservation. In summary, the colonial era in the MENA region influenced labour migration patterns by shaping economic structures and political dynamics. Modern labour migration continues to impact the region's demographics, economies and societies in complex ways.
- **Post-World War II Migration Waves:** Post-World War II migration waves in the MENA region have been instrumental in shaping the demographic, economic and social landscapes of the region. These migration movements were driven by a variety of factors, including economic opportunities, political conflicts

and the search for better livelihoods. Here are some of the significant post-World War II migration waves in the MENA region:

- **Palestinian Displacement:** One of the earliest and most consequential migration waves was the displacement of Palestinians following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This event, known as the Nakba (Catastrophe), led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who sought refuge in neighbouring countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, contributing to the Palestinian refugee crisis that persists to this day.
- **Labour Migration to the Gulf:** Starting in the 1950s and gaining momentum in subsequent decades, the GCC countries experienced a significant influx of labour migrants from countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Egypt. These countries were drawn to the Gulf's booming oil-based economies, seeking employment in construction, infrastructure and other industries. The labour migration patterns often followed the ebb and flow of oil prices.

The Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) sparked a significant wave of migration, propelling many Lebanese individuals to seek refuge in countries across Europe, the Americas and Australia, resulting in the establishment of a sizable Lebanese diaspora. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) prompted widespread migration of Iranians and Iraqis to various corners of the globe, including Europe and North America. The enduring conflicts in Iraq and Syria have forced millions to flee their homes, both within the region and beyond, leading to a refugee crisis with profound humanitarian and geopolitical repercussions. Meanwhile, countries in North Africa, such as Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, have witnessed migration to European nations, propelled by economic disparities and political instability, drawing attention due to its impact on European politics and policies. Yemeni labour migration has played a historically significant role, with Yemeni workers seeking employment

opportunities in the Gulf and other regions, shaped by economic factors like remittances sent back to their families in Yemen. These diverse migration patterns underscore the intricate interplay of conflict, economic disparities and geopolitical factors in shaping the migration landscape across the Middle East and North Africa.

These post-World War II migration waves have had lasting impacts on both the countries of origin and destination. They have contributed to the development of diaspora communities, cultural diversity and complex political dynamics within the MENA region and beyond. Additionally, the challenges faced by migrants and refugees have prompted discussions on human rights, international cooperation and global responses to displacement.

Mapping the MENA Diaspora: A Panorama of Diversity

Mapping the MENA diaspora is a complex endeavour due to the diversity of cultures, languages and historical backgrounds within the region. The MENA diaspora refers to the dispersion of people from the MENA region to various parts of the world, often due to factors such as economic opportunities, education, political instability, conflict, and seeking refuge. Here follows an overview of the diversity within the MENA diaspora:

- **Geographic Diversity:** MENA diaspora communities are dispersed across diverse regions, with a notable presence in Europe, where countries like France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden host substantial populations. The historical ties, economic opportunities and colonial legacies of these nations have played pivotal roles in shaping the diasporic landscape. In North America, the United States and Canada harbour significant MENA diaspora communities, with cities like New York, Los Angeles and Detroit emerging as focal points for sizable Arab-American populations. Latin America, particularly

countries like Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela, accommodates smaller yet noteworthy communities of MENA descent, primarily stemming from immigration waves in the early 20th century. Furthermore, the GCC countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, serve as magnets for labour migrants from various parts of the MENA region, as well as South Asia and beyond, reflecting the intricate global patterns of migration and diaspora formation.

- **Cultural and Religious Diversity:**The MENA diaspora is characterised by its diverse and multifaceted nature, representing a rich tapestry of cultures, languages and religions. The Arab diaspora, a significant component, brings forth a spectrum of Arabic dialects, cultural traditions and a shared historical narrative, contributing to the mosaic of the diasporic experience. Additionally, the Jewish diaspora from the MENA region, historically prominent, underwent significant dispersal due to factors like the establishment of Israel, leading to the settlement of Jewish families across Israel, Europe, the Americas and other regions. The Iranian and Kurdish diaspora, stemming from Iran, Iraq and Turkey, also adds distinct layers to the MENA diasporic landscape. Iranian communities, in particular, carry a rich cultural heritage that transcends national borders, reflecting the complexity and diversity within the broader MENA diaspora.
- **Socioeconomic Diversity:** The dynamics of migration within the MENA diaspora are intricate, encompassing a myriad of factors such as economic aspirations, educational pursuits and family reunification. Economic migrants constitute a significant portion, driven by the desire for enhanced job prospects in countries with robust economies. Concurrently, the MENA region has seen an influx of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflict, political persecution and instability, leading to the formation of refugee communities in various host nations. Educational migration is another facet, with students from the MENA region pursuing

higher education abroad, contributing to a transient population of scholars and professionals. Recognising the multifaceted nature of these migration patterns is crucial when mapping the MENA diaspora, as it underscores the importance of acknowledging the diversity among communities and understanding that each group's experiences, challenges and contributions are unique. Meaningful engagement with local communities, scholars and organisations is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the diverse panorama that defines the MENA diaspora.

Dynamics of Identity and Cultural Preservation

The dynamics of identity and cultural preservation within the context of the MENA region are complex and multifaceted, and are shaped by historical, political, social and economic factors. The term 'diaspora' refers to communities of people who have been dispersed from their original homeland to other parts of the world, often due to factors such as conflict, economic opportunity, or political instability. In the MENA region, various diaspora communities exist, each facing unique challenges and opportunities related to maintaining their cultural identity and heritage.

The dynamics of identity and cultural preservation weave a rich historical tapestry of emigration and migration, shaped by factors like trade, conquest and conflict, resulting in the establishment of diaspora communities worldwide. The Arab diaspora, for instance, finds its origins in the Arab expansion, historic trade routes and colonial influences. Within these diaspora communities, a nuanced exploration of cultural identity unfolds as individuals grapple with the delicate balance between maintaining ties to their ancestral homelands and integrating into their host countries. This process involves a negotiation of cultural practices, values and traditions, reflecting the complex dynamics of identity formation. Language stands as a crucial element in this preservation, with many diaspora communities in the MENA region actively

striving to sustain their native languages through initiatives like language schools, community programmes and literature. In doing so, they not only preserve linguistic heritage but also pass down cultural narratives, fostering a profound sense of connection to their roots. Religion holds a central role in the identity of many diaspora communities, with religious institutions serving as focal points for cultural and social activities, fostering a sense of community among individuals who share the same faith. The advent of communication technology has significantly eased connectivity for diaspora communities, enabling them to stay linked with their homeland and each other through platforms like social media, satellite television and online networks. Cultural preservation is furthered through vibrant events such as festivals, music, dance and food, offering diaspora communities opportunities to celebrate their heritage and share it with their host societies. However, challenges, including discrimination, assimilation pressures and the potential erosion of traditional practices among younger generations, persist. Political conflicts in the homeland can also influence the way diaspora communities perceive their identity and heritage. Many individuals develop "hyphenated identities," identifying with both their ancestral homeland and host country, leading to a unique blend of cultural influences and perspectives. The era of globalisation has facilitated increased transnational interactions, empowering diaspora communities to contribute to their homeland's development through investments, remittances, and advocacy for political and social causes.

In conclusion, the dynamics of identity and cultural preservation among diaspora communities in the MENA region are shaped by a variety of historical, social and technological factors. These communities navigate the challenges of preserving their cultural heritage while adapting to the changing landscapes of their host countries. The process is ongoing and requires a delicate balance between maintaining traditional practices and embracing new opportunities.

Navigating Identity in a Globalised World

Navigating identity in a globalised world is a complex and evolving process. Globalisation, characterized by increased interconnectedness and interdependence among countries and cultures, has led to the blending of identities and the emergence of new challenges and opportunities. Here are some key points to consider when discussing how individuals navigate their identities in a globalised world:

- **Cultural Hybridity**: In a globalised world, people are exposed to a wide array of cultures, ideas and perspectives through media, travel and communication technologies. This exposure often leads to the blending of cultural influences, resulting in a phenomenon known as cultural hybridity. Individuals may adopt elements from different cultures and incorporate them into their identity, creating a unique and multifaceted sense of self.
- **Multiculturalism and Diversity**: Globalisation has led to increased cultural diversity within many societies. This diversity presents opportunities for individuals to interact with people from various backgrounds, learn about different traditions and broaden their worldview. However, it also requires individuals to navigate interactions with people who have differing beliefs and values.
- **Digital Identity**: The rise of digital platforms and social media has given individuals new ways to express their identities. People can curate online personas that may differ from their offline selves, leading to questions about authenticity and the role of technology in shaping identity.
- **Global Citizenship**: Some individuals identify as global citizens, emphasising their sense of belonging to the world as a whole rather than a specific nation or culture. This perspective emphasises shared values, environmental concerns and a commitment to addressing global challenges.

- **Cultural Preservation**: While globalisation promotes the exchange of ideas and cultures, there is also a concern about the potential loss of traditional practices and cultural heritage. Some individuals and communities actively work to preserve their cultural identity in the face of globalisation's homogenising effects.
- **Identity Politics**: Globalisation can exacerbate tensions between different identity groups, leading to identity-based politics and conflicts. Individuals may rally around their cultural, religious or ethnic identities as a response to perceived threats from globalisation.
- **Migration and Diaspora**: Migration, whether forced or voluntary, can lead to the negotiation of identity as individuals and communities adapt to new environments while maintaining ties to their homeland. Diaspora communities often straddle multiple cultural identities, navigating a delicate balance between their heritage and their host culture.
- **Consumerism and Identity**: Consumer culture is often intertwined with identity in a globalised world. People may use products and brands to express their social status, values and interests, contributing to the construction of their identities.
- **Education and Exposure**: Access to education and exposure to diverse perspectives can significantly impact an individual's sense of identity. Exposure to different ideas and worldviews can lead to personal growth and the development of a more nuanced and open-minded identity.
- **Self-Reflection and Adaptation**: Navigating identity in a globalised world requires self-reflection and adaptation. Individuals may need to continuously examine their beliefs, values, and cultural affiliations as they encounter new experiences and information.

In essence, navigating identity in a globalised world involves a dynamic process of self-discovery, negotiation and adaptation. People draw from their cultural backgrounds, experiences, and exposure to new ideas to construct their identities, and

they often find ways to embrace the complexities of their multifaceted selves.

Challenges and Opportunities

The MENA region has a significant and diverse diaspora spread across the globe. This diaspora plays a crucial role in shaping both the region's and their host countries' economies, cultures and societies. Some of the challenges and opportunities associated with the diaspora in the MENA region include:

Challenges

- **Brain Drain**: Many highly skilled individuals from the MENA region migrate to developed countries in search of better educational and career opportunities. This brain drain can lead to a loss of valuable human capital, weakening the region's capacity for innovation and development.
- **Remittance Dependence**: A significant portion of the MENA diaspora's income is sent back to their home countries as remittances. While this can provide financial support to families and contribute to local economies, it also makes these economies dependent on the stability of remittance flows, which can be unpredictable.
- **Cultural Identity and Integration**: Diaspora individuals often face challenges in maintaining their cultural identity while integrating into their host societies. Striking a balance between preserving their heritage and embracing their new environment can be a struggle.
- **Limited Political Participation**: Many diaspora members are excluded from participating in the political processes of both their home countries and host countries. This limits their ability to influence policies that affect their communities.
- **Lack of Coordination**: There might be a lack of coordination and communication among diaspora

members, making it difficult to harness their collective potential for positive change.

Opportunities

- **Knowledge Transfer and Skill Enhancement**: The diaspora often brings back new skills, knowledge and experiences to their home countries, contributing to local innovation and development.
- **Investment and Entrepreneurship**: Members of the diaspora can play a significant role in attracting foreign investment and fostering entrepreneurship in their home countries. They can also create networks that facilitate trade and business relationships between their host and home countries.
- **Cultural Exchange**: The diaspora can act as a bridge for cultural exchange between the MENA region and their host countries, promoting mutual understanding and appreciation.
- **Advocacy and Activism**: Diaspora communities have the potential to raise awareness and advocate for issues affecting their home countries, both internationally and within their host countries.
- **Philanthropy and Social Development**: Many diaspora members engage in philanthropic activities that support social development projects in their home countries, such as education, healthcare and infrastructure.
- **Diplomatic Relations**: The diaspora can contribute to improving diplomatic relations between their host and home countries, fostering collaboration and mutual benefit.
- **Political Engagement**: Although limited, some diaspora members find ways to participate in the political processes of their home countries, advocating for democratic reforms and good governance.

In conclusion, the MENA diaspora presents a range of challenges and opportunities for both the region and its host countries. Addressing the challenges while harnessing

the potential benefits requires a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration between governments, diaspora communities and relevant institutions.

Organisation of this Book

This book aims to explore diasporic experiences scattered across different parts of the world through rethinking the 'MENA region' as a unique experience for those arriving, as much as it is for those departing. It accentuates the region's transnational and/or cosmopolitan bonds with the world and vice-versa by considering the diverse connections, both imagined and actual, that diasporas fabricated in the course of settling in or leaving the region. The processes of re-settlement, establishment, and growth of diasporic communities have produced complex dynamics: changing trans-imperial or trans-national relationships with ancestral homelands; new forms of contestation and collaboration in markets, workplaces, political arenas and social spaces in cities and beyond; conflict and competition with diasporic communities sharing the same heritage elsewhere in the world; and the rise of unprecedented polyglot cultures and hybrid identities that combine local, communal, national and global experiences, as well as individual and communal pursuits past and present.

Overview of the Book

"Diasporas in the MENA Region and Beyond" is a multifaceted journey and a comprehensive exploration of the diverse diasporic communities in the MENA region. This book delves into the complexities of identity, migration, diplomacy, finance and cultural exchange within the MENA region's rich tapestry of diasporas. This book contains 14 chapters divided into 2 sections, each shedding light on a unique aspect of the diaspora experience in this dynamic region.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The journey begins with an introduction that sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the MENA region's diasporas. It highlights the multifaceted nature of these communities and their impact on the region's social, economic, and cultural landscape.

Chapter 2: Navigating Identities

Chapter 2 delves into the intricate process of navigating identities within the diaspora, from local to global perceptions. It explores how individuals and communities grapple with their sense of self and belonging in a transnational context.

Chapter 3: Reimagining Gender and Migration in North Africa

This chapter introduces new methodologies and insights into the experiences of women within the North African diaspora, shedding light on their unique challenges, contributions and agency.

Chapter 4: Navigating Lives

This chapter discusses the impact of male migration on the 'Left Behind Women' in India's changing landscape.

Chapter 5: Diaspora Diplomacy

Chapter 5 explores the role of diasporas in conflict resolution through informal ties. It examines how diaspora communities serve as bridges for peace and diplomacy in the MENA region.

Chapter 6: Diaspora Bond in MENA

In this chapter, the focus shifts to the financial aspects of diasporic life, providing insights into the economic bonds that connect diasporic communities and their impact on the MENA region's financial landscape.

Chapter 7: Construction of Migrant Identity

Chapter 6 explores the construction of migrant identities in the MENA region, unpacking the processes and factors that shape how individuals and groups perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

Chapter 8: The UAE's Soft Power Strategy of Tolerance

This chapter analyses the United Arab Emirates' soft power strategy of tolerance, showcasing how it has peacefully amalgamated multiple diasporas and promoted diversity as a source of strength.

Chapter 9: Multicultural Approach of Indian Diaspora in the UAE

Chapter 9 examines the Indian diaspora's multicultural approach in the UAE, focusing on how diasporic communities negotiate their identities and interact with the media.

Chapter 10: Roots of Identity

Chapter 10 delves into the roots of identity within the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE, unravelling the memories and histories that shape their sense of belonging.

Chapter 11: The Price of Care

This chapter explores the sociality and intermediary networks of Kerala migrant care workers in Israel, shedding light on the challenges and contributions of this specific diaspora group.

Chapter 12: The Dynamic Role of the Indian Diaspora

Chapter 12 highlights the dynamic role of the Indian diaspora in shaping India's relationships with Middle Eastern countries, emphasizing the economic, cultural and political dimensions of this influence.

Chapter 13: Indian Cinema and Cultural Exports

Chapter 13 explores the cultural export of Indian cinema to the Middle East, illustrating how the Indian diaspora has contributed to the region's cultural landscape.

Chapter 14: Kurdish Diaspora's Diverging Political Aspirations

The book concludes with a look at the diverging political aspirations of the Kurdish diaspora in the MENA region, offering insights into the complexities of diaspora engagement in regional politics.

In "Diaspora in the MENA Region and Beyond", we explore the threads that connect diverse diasporic experiences and unearth the invaluable insights they offer. These insights encompass cultural resilience, economic contributions, cultural hybridity and advocacy, all of which underscore the profound impact of diaspora communities on the global stage. Through their stories and journeys, we gain a deeper understanding of the interconnected world we live in and the possibilities that arise when diverse cultures come together. As we continue our exploration in this book, we invite you to immerse yourself in the narratives of these diaspora communities, to learn from their experiences and to appreciate the wealth of knowledge they bring to our shared human experience.

Chapter 2

Navigating Identities: From Diaspora to Global Perceptions

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Abstract

In the exploration of identity formation within the MENA region's diaspora, personal belongingness emerges as a crucial aspect. As we navigate the complexities of religious, cultural, and personal identities influenced by geopolitical dynamics and historical events, the individual's sense of belonging takes center stage. This chapter delves into the intricate interplay between broader societal trends and personal experiences, shedding light on the complexities of belonging, displacement, and the clash of identities between "Islam" and "the West." Against the backdrop of rising nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments, particularly evident in Europe, the chapter underscores the challenges faced by migrants and refugees in their quest for acceptance and safety. Through this lens, we embark on a journey of personal exploration, unraveling the intricacies of belongingness and its significance in the context of the broader diaspora narrative. As we conclude, the imperative for sustainable practices, empowerment of marginalised communities, and international cooperation to address global challenges becomes even more pronounced. The call for sustainable practices, empowerment of marginalised communities, and international cooperation to address global challenges becomes even more emphasized in conclusion.

As a descendant of the labour diaspora, I embarked on an expedition to define my unique sense of 'belonging' from an early age. While immersed in the prevailing discourse of

'immigrant', I failed to truly grasp the profound nature of my parents' journey—an extraordinary display of courage and bravery. Nostalgic memories of my homeland have significantly moulded my life as a member of the diaspora hailing from the MENA region. The notion of 'returning to the motherland' only intensified my feelings of rootlessness, trapping me in a liminal existence, which was both agonising and isolating. The ache for home and a reconnection with my origins became overpowering.

As I grappled with the paradox of harmonising my cultural heritage with my newfound surroundings, a complex array of challenges emerged. The displacement of my first identity became palpable upon my migration to the United Kingdom, manifesting as a form of fragmentation—a tangible upheaval of movement intertwined with the psychological sensation of inhabiting an in-between realm. My ancestral ties to Morocco, deeply ingrained within me, have resulted in a multitude of identities—British, Moroccan, European, North African, Arab, and Muslim Female. Balancing these dual nationalities proved to be a complex task, inducing a sense of marginality within my country of residence. In the context of personal exploration, delving into Morocco's rich cultural diversity and historical context provides further insight into the complexities of national identity and belonging.

Morocco's Cultural Diversity and Historical Context

Morocco's historic crossroads, a junction where people are inherently mobile and open to diverse cultures owing to its strategic position bordering the Arab world, Africa and Europe, while nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, has facilitated robust international connections spanning culture and diversity awareness. Having been raised in Morocco, I have perpetually sensed a rich tapestry of multi-religious and ethnic unity, marked by tolerance and cultural reverence within the Moroccan community. For example, the common exchange of greetings

like 'Shalom' and 'Asalamualaikum' among Abrahamic kin reiterates this coexistence.

Morocco's history is intertwined with a Jewish presence spanning over two millennia. Jews, Muslims and Christians have shared harmonious lives for centuries, with Morocco once hosting the most substantial Arab Jewish community globally, home to a quarter-million Jews at its zenith. In the illuminating work 'Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life', Elmaleh (2012) challenges conventional portrayals of Muslim–Jewish relations, shedding light on the complex interplay and subtleties that defined their interactions. Portraying the narrative of Jewish existence in Morocco, the text intricately depicts the harmonious coexistence between Jews and Muslims over the span of many centuries. The writer delves into the profound chronicles of Berber Jews, providing an insight into their vibrant history. This narrative reinvigorates our understanding of power dynamics and politics.

The Jewish community's demographics changed over time, as highlighted by Laskier (1997), who explored the history of Jewish communities in North Africa prior to the widespread emigration in the early 1960s. He affirms that countries like Morocco once housed some of the world's largest Jewish populations, many of whom migrated to Israel, profoundly shaping the nascent Israeli state's growth trajectory. In a documentary by broadcaster Al Jazeera, Fanny Mergui, a Jewish political activist and returnee, on a pilgrimage to Ouazzane, Morocco, recalls a sense of acute vulnerability within the community. She recounts the pervasive impact of 'intense propaganda' which spurred a significant exodus. In 2004 she returned to Morocco and stated that "There was harmony between Muslim and Jewish culture, most Jews had the same standard of living as other Moroccans, we were all under colonial rule which monopolised the country's wealth". In the ancient town of Agouim, Pinhas Suissa, a Jewish returnee, revisits his childhood: "I remember life as a child, Berber Jews were no different from Muslims, we lived in the same houses, a Muslim family lived next door to a

Jewish one''. I can affirm this view, based on my upbringing in Morocco. Al Jazeera's reporting underscores this remarkable narrative, highlighting the profound and lasting connections that persist between Moroccan Jews and their ancestral homeland, and further affirming the harmony between these two monotheistic religions.

The decision to migrate from Morocco to Israel marked a significant turning point for a substantial portion of the Jewish population. While some resisted the allure of Israel and chose to remain in Morocco, the majority departed, leaving behind a mere 2,000 Arab Jews in the region, according to Rabat and Kasraoui (2021). However, the transition to Israel did not always fulfill the expectations of those who embarked on this journey. Many found themselves marginalised in their adopted homeland, prompting some to return to Morocco. Despite these challenges, their profound ties to Morocco endure, serving as a testament to the enduring power of heritage, culture and Abrahamic kinship. The examination of the motivations, challenges and lasting connections experienced by those who embark on this transformative journey is vital.

Migration

Today, Europe and the USA have emerged as significant destinations for migrants and refugees. According to Pew Research, most of the migration surge which began in 2011 was a consequence of foreign invasion and armed conflict that forced the displacement of millions of people. Forced displacement and migration have boosted the number of migrants from 25 million to 54 million (Pew Research, 2016). Escaping ceaseless conflicts, oppression, and the economic instability fuelled by post-colonial unrest, they embark on perilous journeys aboard overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels, facing the unknown as they seek safety and opportunities. According to UNHRC (2020), conflicts in regions like the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia have emerged as primary drivers of displacement.

In instances of fatalities in the Mediterranean Sea, it becomes glaringly evident that Europe and the US, who possess the capacity to deploy a wide array of resources and manpower for interventions, invasions and war, do not extend the same level of commitment to the tragic fate of thousands of men, women and children hailing from the same countries, who succumb to the Mediterranean's depths. This discrepancy is all the more perplexing when considering the active involvement of these nations in actions such as bombings and interventions in regions like Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mali, Sudan, Palestine and Somalia, to mention just a few.

Pew Research recorded that 2.26 million persons immigrated to the EU in 2021. The idea that there are two sides to every story carries notable significance within this context, uncovering the reasons for migration, and we can reveal the intricacies that drive migrants or those often stereotyped under the brand of 'immigrants' to embark on their journeys, encompassing elements out of their control or desires.

In the framework of significant immigration numbers, such as the 2.26 million persons recorded immigrating to the EU in 2021 by Pew Research, the notion that there are multiple perspectives to consider becomes particularly salient. In considering the reasons behind such migration, we unravel the root causes that propel migrants—often unfairly stereotyped as "immigrants"—to embark on their journeys. These motivations often encompass elements beyond their control or desires. The rise of nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments, and the exploration of how these sentiments shape policies, attitudes, and the lived experiences of migrants within the EU and beyond, becomes imperative.

Rise of Nationalism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

Unfortunately, the rise of nationalism and anti-immigration sentiment in various countries has further complicated the

plight of migrants, obstructing their pursuit of acceptance and safety. Anti-immigrant and refugee sentiment sweeping across Europe has caused a shift in immigration and refugee policies throughout the continent, resulting in the construction of both physical and symbolic barriers to deter populations coming from the global south.

Open racism may be less prevalent in mainstream politics, but there are indications of racism resurfacing as a component of right-wing political policies. Factors such as increasing ethnic minority populations in European cities, international travel, migration pressures from developing countries, and the rise in refugees may be contributing to the apparent rise in racism being seen in the twenty-first century. Discriminatory issues like racism, xenophobia, exclusion, racist attacks and police brutality, particularly against foreigners, remain prevalent in Europe. These problems have increased significantly in recent years: in 2021/22 there were 109,843 racist hate crime incidents recorded by the police service in England and Wales, compared with 92,052 in the previous reporting year (Statistica, 2023).

Morocco has a significant diaspora population, with around five million Moroccans living abroad in Europe (Mahieu, 2022). Migration initially involved men who migrated after World War II to work in Europe during the reconstruction period (Hicham, 2021). The European Union is frequently regarded as a zone of comfort (Cafruny and Ryner, 2003; Schmidt, 2006; Geddes, 2008), which played a central role in motivating my family's decision to migrate and establish roots in the UK. Nonetheless, upon conducting a thorough analysis of post-colonialism from the perspective of the political, cultural, economic, historical and social ramifications of European colonial dominance, one might initiate a re-evaluation of Europe as a 'comfort zone'.

Europe has been a mixture of increasing popular and political hostility in host sites to migrants and asylum seekers, along with the opening of new opportunities for diaspora organisation and mobilisation. The persistence of racism in

modern societies, particularly in Europe, was researched in the work 'Recognising and Confronting Racism in Europe' (Henderson, 2021) wherein the author claims that systemic racism continues to be a problematic menace.

The conversation surrounding anti-racism takes on a unique dimension when considering the European experience. There are three distinct challenges highlighted in recognising and addressing racism in Europe, as suggested by the author: limited knowledge of Europe's historical role in colonisation and enslavement; misunderstanding of present-day inequalities within Europe; and adherence to European models of social cohesion and national identity. These challenges form the bases for the exploration of Islam versus the West. Delving into the complexities of this dynamic relationship, we will examine how historical legacies, contemporary narratives and societal structures shape perceptions and interactions between Islam and the West.

Islam vs the West

In considering Europe and MENA migration today, the EU affirms that it has a robust system for human rights protection, employing effective mechanisms with binding decisions and a sophisticated legal arsenal (European Council, Council of the European Union). However, contrary to the assertions by the EU, certain member states have enacted legislation that formalises exclusion and upholds discriminatory behaviours. To illustrate this further, in 2004, France implemented a ban on the Muslim head covering for women within education spaces. In more recent times, the UK has introduced a barge for migrants that has been denoted as a 'floating prison', which is an 'utterly shameful' way to treat people seeking asylum (Amnesty International, 2023), and both Sweden and Denmark have permitted the burning of the Holy Quran under the guise of democracy and freedom of speech. Further afield, in the United States, fears about the perceived threat of 'Islam' played a significant role in the administration implementing

policies like the travel ban from several Muslim-majority countries, further reinforcing the narrative of confrontation.

Though the EU has advanced in safeguarding human rights, ample proof suggests that there remains a task of tackling the entrenched problems of bias and marginalisation within its boundaries. These challenges underscore the necessity for continuous endeavours to counter racism, foster inclusiveness, and establish parity both in Europe's global and local spheres, including its institutional frameworks.

On a global level, in considering EU relations, the ongoing human rights violations against the Palestinians which started in 1948 with the establishment of the state of Israel (Human Rights Watch, 2022) has been a major driver of displacement, leading to the exodus of millions of people from their homes. "They made the desert bloom" said Ursula von der Leyen, 13th president of the European Commission, in her 2023 speech commemorating the state of Israel.

Disregarding the Nakba (catastrophe) puts European values and human rights ethics under scrutiny. From 1947 to 1949, more than 400 Palestinian villages and approximately one million individuals, including men, women and children, were forcefully evicted from their residences under threat of arms. Suppressed for nearly a century, if this occurred in contemporary times, it would unquestionably be labelled "ethnic cleansing", attests Pappe in his book "The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians", 2007.

The illegal incursion into Iraq stands as another compelling illustration of scrutiny under the EU assertions of Human Rights, as evidenced by the House of Commons and the Chilcot Inquiry in 2016. One may well deduce, that on one side, the motivation behind military interventions, unlawful invasions, and settler colonial practices is fuelled by the desire for resource exploitation, strategic dominance, and a form of capitalism driven by warfare.

In his book, "The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State" (2018), David Vine asserts that since its

invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the United States has been continually engaged in warfare. He claims that this ceaseless cycle of conflict is not as unique as it may appear initially, with the United States having been either involved in war or initiating invasions of other nations nearly every year since its inception. He meticulously traces this enduring pattern of violent confrontation from Christopher Columbus's arrival in Guantanamo Bay in 1494 to the gradual expansion of a global empire over the course of 250 years.

Relying on historical research and first-hand anthropological studies spanning fourteen countries and territories, "The United States of War" exposes how leaders across various generations have ensnared the nation in an unending cycle of war. They achieved this by establishing an unprecedented network of foreign military bases, forming a worldwide framework that has increased the likelihood of aggressive interventionist conflicts.

The book culminates by addressing the devastating consequences of American wars—resulting in millions of casualties, injuries, and displacements, especially in the Middle East. In particular, Israel and the United States entered into a 10-year military support agreement, marking the most substantial commitment of its kind in the history of the United States. Outlined within a Memorandum of Understanding, this arrangement is valued at $38 billion over the span of a decade, reflecting an approximate 27 percent increase from the funds allocated in the previous accord established in 2007. The enduring diplomatic and military partnership between these countries has deep roots, with Israel having been, even before this deal, the primary recipient of U.S. foreign aid since World War II, as documented by the Congressional Research Service (2020).

Beyond unveiling the profit-driven motives, political agendas, racism and toxic masculinity that underlie the West's relationship with war and empire, it reveals how the extensive history of dominance and military expansion influences everyday lives. This influence extends from the multi-

trillion-dollar wars of today to the pervasiveness of violence and militarism.

Understanding the complex shifts in magnitude, evolving patterns, and changing population distributions associated with global socio-political and economic transformations, such as migration, is pivotal for comprehending the evolving landscape of our existence. This comprehension not only helps us make sense of a changing world but also enables us to strategically plan for the future. Vital components in this endeavour include sustainable practices, empowerment of marginalised communities, and fostering international cooperation to address shared global issues. By recognising the interconnectedness of historical legacies and present-day realities, we can pave the way for more effective and inclusive solutions aimed at ensuring a sustainable future in the region. Against this milieu, "Reshaping the Narrative and Identity" delves into the dynamic interplay between historical forces, contemporary challenges, and the quest for collective identity, offering insights into the complexities of navigating shifting narratives and redefining identities in an ever-changing world.

Reshaping the Narrative and Identity

My journey of assimilation also unveiled a profound identity conflict rooted in my religion, Islam. Despite Islam being the second-largest global religion, misconceptions abound, exacerbated by mounting anti-Muslim rhetoric and the unjust association of 'terrorism' with Muslims. These biases and stereotypes have given rise to Islamophobia.

To put the faith into statistical context, the number of Muslims is expected to increase by 70 per cent from 1.8 billion in 2015 to nearly 3 billion in 2060. Muslims are expected to make up more than three-in-ten of the world's people (31.1%), according to Pew Research Centre's demographic projections (2017).

Islamophobia denotes an irrational fear, prejudice, or discrimination directed at Islam and its adherents. This

societal ill has infiltrated Western perspectives, fostering negative attitudes and unfounded generalisations about Muslims. Mitigating Islamophobia stands as a critical imperative for nurturing tolerance, inclusivity and respect for diversity in multicultural societies. The notion of a clash between "Islam" and "the West" looms significantly in the MENA region, and has engendered a skewed perception of homogeneous identities, fostering a misleading dichotomy.

The modern juxtaposition between "Islam" and "the West" hearkens back to the colonial era of the 19th century when an "Orientalist" discourse emerged, framing Europe's perception of the Middle East (Said, 1978; Neumann, 1999). The ideological confrontations of the Cold War era, spanning left and right and the competing nationalisms of individual MENA states, as well as the concept of an imagined Arab nation versus distinct Arab countries, gradually evolved into an emphasis on cultures and religions as the core constituents of collective identities. Historians and empirical analysis have termed this strategy "divide and conquer," aiming to make revolution more challenging, through division. In 1964 in Pal Gardens, New York, Malcolm X, American Muslim minister and human rights activist who was a prominent figure during the civil rights movement stated, "The greatest weapon that the colonial powers have used in the past against our people has always been divide-and-conquer".

Geopolitical matters in the MENA region have been further reframed with the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks also being intertwined with the "Islam" vs. "the West" narrative. While some depicted these events as emblematic of the clash, viewing "Islam" as a symbol of "justice" and "the West" as a champion of "freedom," this perspective oversimplifies the complex realities and dynamics at play.

This phenomenon was part of a global trend in which "identity" assumed increasing political significance (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996). Within the MENA region, this shift led to a re-interpretation of history, including the influence of US interventions in the region and the positioning of Israel.

The origins of the "identity" concept can be traced back to the 19th-century colonial period, characterised by the emergence of an "Orientalist" discourse that shaped how Europe viewed the Middle East and vice versa (Said, 1979). This clash of identities has profound implications for regional politics and international relations, often misperceived as a qualification that "Islam" and "the West" are homogeneous identities, creating a misleading binary divide. Moreover, this concept theorises that global or universalist identity perceptions, such as support for human rights and democratic values, exert influence on the MENA region.

The 20th century witnessed the global political ascendancy of "identity", with ramifications extending to the MENA region. This newfound political salience of identity prompted a re-examination of history, including the role of US interventions and Israel. Consequently, this reorientation has impacted how conflicts and geopolitical issues are framed and comprehended within the region.

Grasping the global identity factors is imperative for comprehending the social and political evolutions in the MENA region. The interplay between "Islam" and "the West," alongside the influence of worldwide identity perceptions, has fundamentally shaped the region's dynamics and conflicts. Acknowledging these factors has enabled me to attain a more nuanced grasp of the intricacies of the MENA region and its relations within the broader global context.

The proliferation of the discourse depicting a global confrontation between "Islam" and "the West" is unmistakably observable in the propagation of this narrative on a global scale. Some factions intentionally propagate this narrative, as exemplified by Islamist radicals of various shades, perpetrating acts of terrorism who employ and reinforce the narrative of an insurgent "Islam" pitted against "the West." The diffusion of these narratives has had discernible implications for social and political outcomes. The rise of far-right movements in Europe, fuelled by Islamophobia (characterised by collective fear and denigration

of all Muslims, rather than just the criminals who represent them), has concurrently shifted the European political centre towards the right.

Simultaneously, elements within the far right in the Western world promote and propagate this narrative. Events like the Mediterranean migration crisis have been exploited to intensify apprehensions about "Islam" and amplify a perception of siege in Europe.

The widespread acceptance of these narratives has also facilitated the ascent of far right movements in Europe, thereby shifting the political equilibrium of the continent towards the right. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as Islamophobia, encompassing a collective aversion to and disparagement of all Muslims, extending beyond those solely responsible for acts of violence.

These distorted narratives find traction among elements of the far right in the Western world and mainstream media, exerting considerable influence over attitudes, policies and interactions between diverse communities and regions. Effectively comprehending and addressing these narratives is imperative for fostering tolerance, inclusivity and harmonious coexistence in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

Notably, the Western media consistently harms and degrades certain social groups by reinforcing the status quo or by amplifying stereotypes, namely practising representational harm. A study found that terrorist attacks committed by Muslim extremists receive 357% more US press coverage than those committed by non-Muslims, according to research from the University of Alabama, utilising the Global Terrorism Database. Terrorist attacks committed by non-Muslims (or where the religion was unknown) received an average of 15 headlines, while those committed by Muslim extremists received 105 headlines. These findings were based on all terrorist attacks in the US between 2006 and 2015 according to the Global Terrorism Database (2018). The disparity in media coverage is particularly at odds with reality, given that

white and right-wing terrorists carried out nearly twice as many terrorist attacks as Muslim extremists between 2008 and 2016.

In the realm of Western media, a disconcerting pattern emerges—one of being the unrelenting cheerleaders of war. In his book, "War Made Invisible, How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine", acclaimed veteran and political analyst Solomon delivers a searing exposé of how the American military, with the help of the media, conceals its perpetual war. Profound revelations act as symbolic stepping stones on this intellectual journey, shedding light on the Western media's active role as promoters of conflict and warfare. They validate the assertion that "Western media act as advocates for war", encompassing propaganda and the suppression of information, aligned with Western interests.

Despite the relentless propagation of the discourse surrounding a global clash since 2011's global war on terror, with discernible and deleterious effects on the MENA region, the identities within this region are not monolithically shaped by this singular factor. Countervailing forces, operating both on a global and regional scale, stand as formidable barriers against the supposed clash of civilisations that looms large. The gravitational pull of universalist ideals, which serve as the bedrock for concepts like democracy and human rights, exerts a substantial influence within the MENA region. I consider that the interplay between Islam, democracy and modernity at the grassroots level defies facile dichotomies, and demand a nuanced understanding.

The relationship between Islam, democracy and modernity cannot be reduced to simplistic clashes. The notions of "democracy" and "human rights" are not exclusively owned by the West but have a broader global nature.

Amidst the prevailing discourse that often pits Islam against the West in a supposed clash of civilisations, I, as a descendant of the diaspora, challenge this unjust narrative. Fundamentally, understanding the complexities inherent in the MENA region requires us to actively avoid the perilous

trap of oversimplification. It is imperative to grasp the multifaceted array of factors that shape identities and political aspirations in this region, including the pervasive influence of universalist principles such as democracy and human rights. As we delve into "Reframing Islam vs the West," we embark on a journey to deconstruct prevailing narratives, explore nuanced perspectives, and shed light on the intricacies of this dynamic relationship. Through a lens of critical inquiry and empathy, we aim to reshape the discourse surrounding Islam and the West, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between cultures, ideologies and historical legacies.

Reframing "Islam vs the West"

Whilst the narratives of "Islam versus the West" have sown seeds of destruction, stoking conflicts and sowing division, glimmers of hope emerge through the presence of countervailing forces, including diverse diaspora communities and transnational social movements. These offer the promise of a more sophisticated and all-encompassing political landscape across the MENA region. By wholeheartedly acknowledging and embracing these global identities and connections, the region embarks on a trajectory of cooperation, comprehension and reciprocal esteem.

Another example of such understanding can be seen in the book "Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy" by Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008). This book deftly navigates the landscape of Islamophobia in the United States, shedding light on the negative stereotypes and apprehensions that have woven themselves into the American consciousness. In the post-9/11 era, the perception of a "clash of civilisations" has taken root, painting Islam as a looming menace in the theatre of the "War on Terror". These perceptions, rooted in unexamined anxieties, have burgeoned over time, particularly in moments of crisis or significant events involving Muslims.

The term "Islamophobia" serves as an apt descriptor for this unsettling phenomenon. It encapsulates the fears,

suspicions and resentments that unfoundedly cling to Islam and Muslim cultures, often in the absence of genuine comprehension of the religion or the diverse tapestry of Muslim-majority nations. These anxieties find their sustenance in rare incidents that validate existing prejudices, fanning the flames of an unending cycle of fear and bias.

The referenced book unveils the potent impact of political cartoons as a formidable print medium, laying bare the West's tendency to vilify and belittle Muslims and Islam. This demonisation, as the book compellingly asserts, transcends political ideologies, extending its reach across the spectrum, where both liberals and conservatives contribute to the corrosive portrayal of Islam. Additionally, the book highlights the general misunderstanding of the Muslim world. It addresses the misconception that Islam is primarily a Middle Eastern religion, even though the majority of Muslims reside in South and Southeast Asia. The text further challenges the assumption that an extensive portion of Muslims are militant fundamentalists when, in reality, they represent only a small proportion of the Muslim population. His observations subsequently provoke the notion that it might not be unreasonable to re-characterise this "war on terror" as a "war on Islam".

Overall, his work sheds light on the issue of Islamophobia in the West and emphasises the crucial importance of understanding and countering these negative stereotypes and anxieties through more accurate and informed perspectives on Islam and Muslim cultures.

In the grand tapestry of thought, from scrutinising settler colonialism to unmasking the tendrils of Islamophobia, the unifying thread is clear—an unwavering commitment to challenge prevailing narratives, advocate for justice, and foster an atmosphere of respect and understanding for all cultures and races.

The colonial dogma has, time and again, resulted in the dispossession of ancestral lands, the obliteration of age-old indigenous traditions and histories, and the imposition

of Eurocentric norms and values, all bearing witness to the profound disruption caused by Western colonisation. These sentiments resonate strongly in the scholarly works of figures like Michael M. Laskier (1997). This history has spurred a critical examination of settler colonialism, grounded in the poignant experiences of indigenous peoples who have borne the brunt of European colonisation. The troubling narratives find their roots in the history of colonialism, which has deeply scarred not only my homeland but also the entire continent of Africa. As we delve into "Indigenous Critiques of Settler Colonialism", we embark on a journey to unpack the enduring legacies of colonial violence, explore indigenous perspectives, and confront the ongoing struggles for land, sovereignty and cultural survival. Through this lens of critical inquiry and empathy, we seek to amplify indigenous voices, challenge dominant narratives and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding decolonisation and indigenous rights.

Indigenous Critiques of Settler Colonialism

I find myself focusing my critique on a fundamental concept: the sacred significance of land within indigenous cultures. Unlike the mere materialistic perspective, land is an intrinsic part of my historical, religious, cultural and social identity. The European onslaught, with its unquenchable thirst for land acquisition and resource exploitation, severed these sacred connections, plunging indigenous communities into a vortex of suffering and loss.

Breaking free from the grip of Eurocentric thought is essential, as it imposes an artificial lens that deems progress and development as universal ideals. Even in the realm of post-colonial theories, remnants of this perspective persist, erroneously assuming that the trajectory of European modernity should guide all societies. However, as an indigenous descendant, I vehemently challenge this monolithic view, as it erases the rich tapestry of cultures and worldviews, inadvertently upholding colonial paradigms of dominance.

The transference of populations and the imposition of external power structures have left indelible and far-reaching imprints on the cultures, lands and rights of indigenous communities across the globe. Acknowledging the historical roots of these phenomena is essential for comprehending the intricate complexities of the current challenges and underscores the imperative for a thoughtful and respectful approach to addressing them.

Additionally, the Eurocentric worldview frequently dismisses indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies, labelling them as primitive or inferior (Held, 2019). Yet, indigenous critiques endeavour to showcase the intricate depth and sophistication of their own knowledge systems, intricately interwoven with their profound connection to the land and ancestral heritage.

Across the globe, indigenous communities continue their valiant struggles for self-determination and the reclamation of ancestral territories. These battles are a resolute response to the lingering shadows of settler-colonialism, demanding recognition of indigenous sovereignty and rights. It is a struggle that resonates deeply with my own convictions, transcending geographical boundaries to echo the cries of solidarity from Palestine.

Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General, declared in their report published in 2022, "Our report reveals the true extent of Israel's apartheid regime. Whether they live in Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, or Israel itself, Palestinians are treated as an inferior racial group and systematically deprived of their rights. We found that Israel's cruel policies of segregation, dispossession, and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid. The international community has an obligation to act".

Principally, I attest that indigenous critiques of settler colonialism can offer a profound and philosophical counterpoint to the legacy of colonisation. In my role today as an activist and human rights defender for the Palestinian

cause, I confront prevailing narratives, scrutinise notions of universalism, and underscore the paramount importance of indigenous peoples and their rights under international law. By engaging deeply with these critiques, we can effectively confront the lingering ramifications of colonial practices and work steadfastly towards an equitable future that honours the rights and dignity of indigenous communities. Today, I strive to reclaim the [unjust] narrative.

The aim of establishing a "fair and equitable" society, where every individual holds value, their rights are acknowledged and safeguarded, and decisions are conducted with fairness and integrity, stands as a fundamental objective. The rule of law functions as a safeguard, ensuring that everyone can be held responsible for their actions and that no entity remains exempt from legal principles. This holds immense significance in upholding a fully operational democratic structure.

Human rights embody the cherished values of fairness, equality, and dignity that unite us all. Human rights law serves as a conduit, giving life to these principles. It is designed to safeguard our right to voice dissent and offer prayers, to think freely and express our thoughts openly, and to shield our private lives from intrusion.

The current plight of the Palestinian people represents a pivotal global justice concern of our era. It transcends a mere "conflict" between two equal factions; rather, it manifests as an "occupation" enforced by a formidable military state, bolstered by Western support, against an impoverished, displaced populace bereft of statehood.

For a span of over 75 years, Israel has systematically subjected Palestinians to egregious human rights violations, marked by profound discrimination and lethal military force. Over a million Palestinians continue to endure discrimination, being denied equal access to public services, land and employment. Esteemed organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have raised their voices on this matter.

Amnesty International asserts that Israel's blockade of Gaza has plunged its 1.9 million inhabitants into a blizzard of poverty and psychological torment. The construction of an apartheid wall, the military lockdown of the Jordan Valley, and the annexation of East Jerusalem coalesce to establish an irrevocable reality of enduring occupation.

Israeli influential historian, Pappe, presents a groundbreaking account of the Occupied Territories, building upon the success of his previous work on the 1948 "War of Independence". This insightful examination picks up the narrative where "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine" concluded.

Within this extensive exploration of one of the world's lengthiest and most tragic occupations, Pappe leverages recently declassified archival materials to scrutinise the motives and tactics of both military leaders and politicians. He delves into the decision-making process itself, which served as the bedrock for the ongoing occupation. Pappe's narrative encompasses a study of the legal and bureaucratic systems established to manage the populace of over one million Palestinians, along with the robust security mechanisms that rigorously enforced such control. In his 2016 book, "The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories", Pappe vividly portrays an immense "open prison", encapsulating the essence of the world's largest of its kind. Irish Times book review stated, "What is new in 'The Biggest Prison on Earth' is Pappe's detailed accounting of exactly what the Israeli planners were contemplating in 1963; namely, the largest ever mega-prison for a million and a half people".

It is hardly surprising that the MENA diaspora community extends unwavering support to the Palestinian people's quest for justice. These overarching, global ideational frameworks have effectively nurtured a collective sense of identity among fellow like-minded activists throughout the region and beyond. This shared identity, in turn, has been instrumental in catalysing the mobilisation for both social and

political transformation. These movements have consistently championed the causes of human rights, democracy and social justice, transcended the confines of national borders, and left an indelible mark on regional politics.

A crucial catalyst in these processes of group identity formation and political mobilisation has been the prevalent narrow portrayal of reality by journalism in the Western media. The deep-rooted mistrust of mainstream Western media among MENA diaspora communities stems from historically problematic Western foreign policies and the need for transparency and sensitivity. Specifically, in the context of MENA, mistrust of international mainstream media has often promoted human rights justifications for countless political agendas and what I have come to conclude as "war capitalism", as asserted by Beckhert (2016).

As an activist and employment law advisor, working under the "Reclaim The Narrative" brand, I play a pivotal role in challenging mainstream media and workplace narratives, representing and advocating for human rights and employee rights simultaneously. I am driven by Martin Luther King's notable declaration, "All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence". In addition, I also reclaim the narrative with religious philosophy, namely Islam and my ancestral MENA region.

From my indigenous perspective, I challenge the Eurocentric view that universal progress and development represent overarching ideals. Post-colonial theories, at times, inadvertently perpetuate this paradigm by assuming that European modernity's trajectory is a universal yardstick. I actively contend that such universalism obscures the tapestry of cultures and worldviews, perpetuating colonial ideologies that rationalise divisions and conflicts.

In "Israel's colonial project in Palestine: Brutal Pursuit", the author claims that colonialism is grounded in three core aspects: violence, territorial control, and manipulation of populations, all of which are built upon racialist ideologies

and practices. Examining the endeavour in Israel/Palestine through the lens of settler colonialism uncovers the underlying strategies and objectives driving the region's governance, marked by tactics such as violence, repressive state regulations and racially oriented surveillance methods. Drawing from sociological, historical and postcolonial studies, author Elia Zureik provides an examination of the colonial project in Palestine, spanning from Israel's foundation in 1948 to the actions and decisions of the present-day government.

The Eurocentric worldview often dismisses indigenous knowledge as rudimentary or inferior, while indigenous critiques illuminate the intricate depth and refinement of their own knowledge, intricately interwoven with their connection to the land and ancestral heritage (Held, 2019).

The struggle for self-determination and the reclamation of ancestral lands persists among indigenous peoples across the globe. These efforts strive to confront the enduring echoes of settler colonialism, demanding recognition of indigenous sovereignty and rights.

In summation, I affirm that indigenous critiques of settler colonialism can offer a robust philosophical response to the legacy of European colonisation, by challenging the prevailing narratives, probing the notion of universalism, and underscoring the centrality of land and indigenous international human rights. Engaging with and comprehending these critiques paves the way for addressing the persistent repercussions of colonial practices, working towards a future marked by justice and equity, where the rights and dignity of indigenous communities are fully honoured.

The enduring ramifications of colonialism have profoundly shaped various corners of the world, including the MENA region. Postcolonialism theory provides a critical examination of the multifaceted impacts of colonial rule, typically attributed to European powers (Elam, 2019). This comprehensive framework delves into the realms of politics, culture, aesthetics, economics, linguistics, history and society.

At its core are the enduring effects of colonialism, with the aim of deconstructing its foundations.

Eminent figures like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frantz Fanon have propelled the postcolonial perspective, unsettling prevailing assumptions and power structures. It effectively counters the predominant White perspectives that have shaped historical narratives about other cultures (Said, 2001).

The essence of postcolonialism lies in its mission to amplify marginalised voices and intervene in shaping perceptions. It strives to recalibrate thought processes and behaviours, fostering improved intercultural relations. Under the "Reclaim the Narrative" umbrella, I am able to shed light on mainstream media bias, and align with the perspective of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israeli NGO BT'Selem, that the theft, oppression and exploitation of Palestine and Palestinians is being sold to us at the cost of truth and justice.

To tackle the contemporary environmental challenges in the MENA region, it is imperative to acknowledge and comprehend the historical context of colonialism, as these historical legacies continue to influence present-day issues. A profound understanding of these epi-historical factors is indispensable for addressing the intricate challenges confronting MENA countries today.

The impact of colonial powers reverberates through resource exploitation, arbitrary border delineations and subsequent displacement of ethnic and tribal communities in MENA countries. This discord over land and resources has ignited conflicts, ultimately leading to a surge in population displacement and refugee crises. Furthermore, the legacy of colonialism renders MENA nations susceptible to geopolitical clashes, centred around resource control and territorial dominance. These conflicts exact an ecological toll, disrupt communities, and ravage infrastructure, thereby exacerbating the region's environmental predicaments.

In observing conflict dynamics from diverse external perspectives and gauging the influence of multifaceted political opportunity structures, the concept of "war capitalism" is not to be dismissed. This is a term used to describe the violent exploitation of the non-West through piracy, enslavement, theft of natural resources, and the physical seizure of markets, as outlined by historian Sven Beckert in his widely acclaimed book, "Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism".

Understanding the historical context of colonisation and imperialism becomes paramount when dissecting the ongoing struggles faced by indigenous communities today. The forced displacement of populations and the imposition of external power structures have cast enduring shadows over the cultures, lands and rights of indigenous societies worldwide.

Postcolonialism serves as a lens through which we strive to unravel the intricate legacy of Western colonial and imperial dominance, which has left an indelible mark on our world's social, political and economic frameworks since its inception in the 1400s. Delving into the aftermath of colonialism on the knowledge and identities of both the colonisers and the colonised, postcolonialism emerges as a global critical theory with profound insights into the foundational structures of power, knowledge and identity in our contemporary world. As we explore the diverse factors shaping identity, we draw upon the insights of postcolonial theory to navigate the complexities of identity formation amidst the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Through this exploration, we aim to deepen our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics that influence how individuals and communities construct and negotiate their identities in a postcolonial world.

Diverse Factors Shaping Identity

The convergence of Critical Theory and postcolonial perspectives coalesces around the theme of development and its intricate entwinement with Eurocentrism and White supremacy. McCarthy's critical theory of global development

is viewed as a move towards confronting Eurocentrism and affording voice to critical viewpoints originating beyond Western boundaries (Tinsley, 2021). However, certain post-colonialists posit that vestiges of modern imperialism persist within it.

Further extending the discourse, Allen, a distinguished feminist scholar, delves deeply into her work, "The End of Progress: Decolonising the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory." In this study, she provocatively questions the lessons critical theory can glean from its postcolonial critics, asserting that reliance on a normative framework grounded in Western modernity is inadequate as a standard for social and epistemic evolution. These perspectives underscore that the validity of critical viewpoints hinges upon a normative foundation anchored in Western modernity, potentially reinforcing the presumption of Western intellectual superiority.

Allen's critique sheds a glaring light on the imperative for critical theory to engage in introspection and embrace postcolonial perspectives that challenge the hegemonic paradigms centred around the West. In my contention, deconstructing normative foundations and engaging in robust dialogue with postcolonial criticisms positions critical theory to chart a course toward a more inclusive and decolonised approach. This evolution involves the recognition and appreciation of diverse knowledge systems and experiences beyond the Western framework. By delving into these critiques, we embark on a transformative journey, one that confronts the indelible echoes of colonial practices.

Through this journey, we pave the way for a future imbued with justice and equity, one that reveres the rights and dignity of indigenous peoples while embracing and celebrating the rich mosaic of cultures and races.

The ongoing propagation of unjust narratives against Islam poses a threat to global peace. These misrepresented narratives can be swiftly challenged through the interpretation of various scriptures underscoring the inherent principle of faith, equality, and respect for all races. Hadiths and

Quranic passages explicitly endorse equality among all races, underscoring this as an inherent principle of the faith.

Notably, in his last sermon, our prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white; [none have superiority over another] except by piety and good action". (Human Appeal, 2020).

A prominent advocate for human rights, having embraced Islam in 1963, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, Malcolm X, famously pronounced from Makkah; "Islam is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem".

Malcolm X flew to Makkah to perform Hajj, or the Pilgrimage, and what he saw there affected him deeply. As Black men and White men prayed side-by-side in complete harmony, his eyes were opened to the true beauty and meaning of Islam (Haley, 2007). In his now famous letter to his assistants, entitled Letter from Makkah, Hajj Malik writes: "Never have I witnessed such overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad and all the other Prophets of the Holy Scriptures. America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered white – but the white attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practised by all colors together, irrespective of their color'.

Islam acknowledges and holds in high regard the diversity of all races. This is shown in the verse: O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may "get to" know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is

the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware. Quran - Al Hujurat 49:13

My personal interactions with the host country were influenced by various identity dilemmas, where my cultural and religious practices, norms and political views were ridiculed and diminished, further eroding my identity. I came to realise that I needed to study and reshape my hybrid identity, leading to a shift away from the notion of merely "fitting in".

This journey prompted me to educate myself to facilitate and encourage cross-cultural interaction and fusion, opening new avenues of thought and perspective. It challenged the binary notion of seeing oneself in contrast to an imaginary "other". This process of assimilation and educational growth within the dominant culture of the host country propelled me beyond the confines of stereotypical experiences of uprootedness and marginalisation. I soon found myself coaching senior management in UK corporations on cultural awareness, diversity and inclusion. Driven by a desire for change, I pursued a career in human resources management; this decision became a cornerstone of my journey. Conflict management and equal opportunities were integral aspects of my role, serving as a launching pad for my objective to coach recognition and respect of diverse cultures and faiths.

In an era of globalisation, as I work to reshape the narrative, I have undergone significant adaptation and transformation, nurturing a vision that empowers me to uncover prosperity in my host country. The complexities inherent in diaspora experiences, the profound significance of cultural identity, and the imperative for inclusive and respectful engagement with diaspora communities took centre stage as I embarked on a journey to forge a cohesive sense of self within my new cultural milieu, the British-Moroccan fusion.

Achieving a sense of pride and elevation in my British existence demanded the pursuit of higher education, in my new-found role in human resources, to facilitate and create

educative spaces for coaching and development of corporate employees. The postcolonial perspective holds significance within the British education system, which has predominantly presented White viewpoints, particularly in historical narratives of pivotal events. The lack of "viewpoint" diversity in historical texts left me deeply confounded.

In her book, "Decolonising Educational Leadership: Exploring Alternative Approaches to Leading Schools", Ann E. Lopez masterfully presents the case for critical and liberating strategies in educational leadership. Lopez suggests that by delving into the cultural dynamics within diasporic educational spaces, the imperative to decolonise education and curriculum in public secondary schools becomes evident. She advocates for mainstream education to be more inclusive and responsive to the diverse experiences and viewpoints of marginalised communities.

This perspective underscores the transformative potential of diasporic educational spaces and their role in combatting xenophobia and racialisation within educational environments. It highlights the significance of acknowledging and valuing the contributions of these communities, urging a more equitable and decolonised approach to education in Western societies.

Recognising the transformative potential of diasporic educational spaces and their ability to counteract xenophobia and racialisation in educational settings is paramount. This perspective underscores the importance of acknowledging and valuing the contributions of these communities, calling for a more equitable and decolonised approach to education in the Western context. Furthermore, by incorporating an unbiased approach into the curriculum, educators can help to promote a more informed and compassionate generation that values diversity and understands the importance of challenging stereotypes and discrimination, conceivably eroding the notion of "them" and "us".

I conclude that indigenous critiques of settler-colonialism are deeply enmeshed in the lived experiences of

indigenous peoples, who have borne the brunt of European colonisation's consequences. Settler colonialism encompasses the establishment of new societies by European settlers on lands pre-inhabited by indigenous communities, often leading to land dispossession, erasure of indigenous traditions and imposition of Eurocentric norms.

Central to indigenous critiques is the reverence for land within indigenous cultures, wherein land is not a mere commodity but an integral facet of spiritual, cultural and social identity. The onslaught of European colonisation, focused on land acquisition and resource exploitation, disrupted these deep connections, inflicting profound suffering and loss upon indigenous societies.

Promoting sustainable practices, empowering marginalised communities and fostering international cooperation to address shared global challenges are of utmost importance. Recognising the intricate interplay of historical and contemporary factors enables us to develop more effective and comprehensive solutions for a sustainable future in the region. It is essential to foster an inclusive environment where individuals are accepted for their identities, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. This sentiment promotes diversity, tolerance and understanding among different communities, a distant recollection that I cherished during my upbringing in Morocco.

In my journey, I have come to realise that the experiences of diaspora communities are complex and challenging. We find ourselves in foreign lands, which can lead to a deep sense of displacement and a yearning for our homelands. This state of "living in-between" has its pains, often leaving us marginalised and struggling with matters of cultural identity, discrimination and resistance to the dominant culture.

As I have gone through the process of assimilation into the dominant culture of my adopted country, I have witnessed the transformation of my diaspora identity and the emergence of a unique hybrid identity. While this blending of cultures

can sometimes lead to conflict, it has also opened up new perspectives and ways of thinking for me.

The forces of globalisation have significantly altered my diaspora experiences, compelling me to broaden my vision and relinquish some aspects of our national identities. While this shift has brought both success and prosperity in my new home, it can also result in feelings of estrangement from my place of origin.

The diaspora is not defined in homogenous or nationalistic terms within this context. Instead, it seeks to celebrate and understand its varied and rich manifestations as it traverses borders, shifting from margin to centre, and finding itself in the intersections of multiple sites and influences.

The aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks cast an unprecedented spotlight on Muslims, generating heightened scrutiny and public attention. Undeniably, this intensified focus often gave rise to misunderstandings and a notable lack of comprehension concerning Islam and its practitioners.

A troubling trend that emerged during this period revolves around the polarisation of viewpoints toward Muslims, a division notably driven by political affiliations. This polarisation has led to increasingly divergent attitudes and perceptions regarding Muslims, fostering an atmosphere characterised by mounting contention and division.

Cultural or religious differences should not be a tool for Western politicians and media to drive a wedge between their communities and adoptive societies. To foster a more comprehensive and empathetic society, I firmly believe in the importance of integrating the experiences, viewpoints and voices of Muslim individuals into various institutional and social contexts.

As an activist, I am committed to achieving this goal through the following personal strategies. Forums, transnational networks, and social media platforms have

emerged as spaces in which new political identities and modes of political activism are forming among MENA diaspora communities. I actively engage in online activism in reflective dialogues that delve deep into stereotypes, bias, discrimination and religious prejudice.

By analysing real-world instances and discussing the consequences of such attitudes, I try to encourage critical thinking, anticipating cultivation of empathy for injustices that violate international law and basic human rights. I firmly advocate that this principle is particularly relevant in cases where migration is compelled due to unjust invasions, interventions that continue in modern- and historical-day colonial practices, including apartheid.

The global movement for human rights gained strength with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. Crafted as a "shared benchmark for all peoples and nations", this Declaration marked a historic milestone by articulating fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that every individual should be entitled to.

Over time, it has garnered widespread acceptance as the foundational principle of human rights that demand universal respect and safeguarding. The UDHR, along with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, collectively constitute the commonly referred to International Bill of Human Rights. In the very year the bill was ratified, the native inhabitants of Palestine endured a catastrophic event, known as the Nakba, and even now, their ongoing fight persists despite the established International Bill of Human Rights.

By confronting bias and discrimination, we create a platform to engage in discussions that can manifest in personal interactions, educational environments, communities, and society at large. By encouraging alternative experiences and perspectives, we can foster nurturing and compassionate

global peace by championing allyship aligned with basic human rights as enshrined in International Law.

Conclusion: Call for Inclusivity and Cooperation

Weaving together my approaches, I actively contribute to the development of an enlightened and empathetic narrative that values diversity and comprehends the significance of challenging stereotypes, discrimination and injustices. This approach serves as the foundation for shaping a more inclusive society where every individual, regardless of their background or beliefs, is treated with respect and esteem. Embracing the term "diaspora" and acknowledging its multifaceted nature allows societies to cultivate enhanced integration, understanding and collaboration among diverse communities. This acknowledgement has the potential to foster mutually advantageous relationships and fortify the bonds linking migrants with their countries of origin.

To facilitate constructive interaction, it is imperative for countries of origin to implement supportive policies towards their diaspora populations. These policies may encompass efforts to engage with diaspora communities, create channels for their participation, and address their concerns and needs. Addressing these challenges necessitates concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including educators, media outlets, community leaders and policymakers.

Educating the public about Islam, its beliefs, practices, and contributions, can help dispel myths and promote a more accurate understanding of the faith and its followers. Engaging in open and respectful dialogue fosters empathy and breaks down stereotypes, with understanding the foundations and teachings of Islam being vital in tackling Islamophobia—a fundamental step toward promoting tolerance, inclusivity and respect for the diverse fabric of our multicultural societies. Promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding plays a pivotal role in building bridges between communities and fostering a sense of unity and mutual respect.

While apartheid in South Africa may belong to the past, in 1997, Nelson Mandela notably drew parallels between the struggles of South Africa and Palestine, emphasising, "We are acutely aware that our liberation remains unfinished without the liberation of the Palestinians". The prevalence of continued systematic global institutionalised supremacy further emphasises the need for continued vigilance and efforts to promote equality and inclusivity in society, drawing lessons from history.

The MENA diaspora's presence in various parts of the world can be viewed as either a resource to be harnessed or a threat to be contained, largely influenced by political and geopolitical realities. By actively seeking to learn about different religions, cultures and perspectives, and by embracing diversity, we move towards a more informed and compassionate society that celebrates the richness of human experiences. Recognising and reclaiming genuine identities, histories and ancestries, and being proud of them through education, workplace coaching and online activism, helps reclaim the narrative and escape stereotypes perpetuated by the media and enacted in local societies. By drawing lessons from history, we can acknowledge the value of our differences and strengthen our individual, yet collective, identity. Acquiring knowledge about the history and reality of our diaspora narrative empowers our identity, enabling us to take control of our own stories as descendants of the MENA diaspora.

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Chapter 3

Reimagining Gender and Migration in North Africa: New Methodologies and Insights

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Abstract

The present chapter explores the use of new methodologies to examine the gendered nature of migration in North Africa. All migrants experience migration-related stress and the social, cultural, economic and mental health outcomes of migration. However, gender is an important construct that significantly and uniquely influences the experiences of migrants. Understanding the gendered nature of migration is crucial to developing effective and gender-sensitive policies. However, the traditional methodologies frequently used to study gender and migration in the region are flawed by a disproportional focus on the experiences and perspectives of men. Moreover, homogenisation of the migrant groups significantly limits the understanding of intersectionality in gendered experiences. The chapter highlights the potential of new methodologies such as participatory action research, digital storytelling and feminist ethnography for generating insights into the complexities of the ways in which gender moulds the experiences of migration. The chapter further discusses the strengths of these new methodologies in empowering female migrants and centring their perspectives at all stages of the research. Moreover, the new methodologies also have the potential to enhance the understanding of migration experiences of gender minorities. The chapter concludes with recommendations to

conduct participatory, collaborative, inclusive and culturally sensitive future research.

Keywords: gender, migration, participatory action research, digital storytelling, intersectional feminist methodologies

Introduction

Migration is an age-old phenomenon that signifies the desire of humans for dignity, safety and growth. McNeil (1984) claims that by the time our ancestors evolved into being fully human they were already migratory and rapidly occupied most continents. He identified four kinds of migration that were prevalent among the premodern humans: forced displacement of one population by another by using systematic force; gradual movement into a place with some level of acceptance from the existing population but without the removal of the existent leaders; domination of one population by another followed by establishing of a symbiotic relationship between the two; and finally, the infiltration by communities or individuals uprooted from their native place by traders or slave raiders. Patterns and extent of migration are influenced by a variety of reasons, including but not limited to factors like political instability, social and cultural reasons and economic opportunities. These factors are experienced by all migrating individuals. However, it is crucial to understand that men and women have different experiences of migration. Gender also plays a significant role in the process of decision-making regarding migration and migration outcomes.

The decision to migrate is often collective in nature, and is not taken in isolation by any individual. However, the power to take such decisions rests inordinately in the hands of the men of the family. Joya & Pallister-Wilkins (2021) claim that in North Africa, the decisions to migrate are mostly taken by men as they are the "breadwinners". According to research findings, men are more likely than women to migrate for economic reasons and better job opportunities (ILO, 2018). However, women are more likely to migrate to cater to the societal expectations of marriage, childbirth, or domestic

work. They may even migrate to fulfil family responsibilities of taking care of children or elderly relatives (Kofman, 2014). Such gendered decision-making is the result of traditional gender roles and patriarchal expectations that limit the agency of women to make migration-related decisions. Gendered aspects of migration also reflect in other migration-related experiences that affect men and women differently. According to a study by UN Women (2020), migrant women are more likely to experience gender-based violence and discrimination compared to migrant men. Men, however, are likely to experience isolation and loneliness, especially if they leave their families behind. According to another study, both men and women who migrate in North Africa may experience abuse, discrimination and harassment (ICMC, 2020). However, men have a greater likelihood of benefitting in terms of economic opportunities and social status. The study also reported that migrating women may have reduced access to social and healthcare services, making them more vulnerable.

An improved understanding of the gendered aspects of migration is crucial to the planning and implementation of effective and gender-sensitive policies and programsme. Therefore, the study of migration and gender is being recognised as a significant area of research. However, commonly used methodologies do not sufficiently capture the intersectional and complex experiences of migrant women. Hence, the present chapter aims to identify the limitations of existing methodologies. It further aims to critically analyse the methodologies that can overcome these limitations and reflect on the ethical and practical considerations of using them.

Critique of Existing Methodologies

There has been an increase in the literature on migration over the years. However, the focus on and understanding of the gendered aspects of migration remains inconsistent. This is partly due to the limitations of the existing methodologies. One of the limitations of the existing methodologies is their tendency to disproportionately focus on the experiences

of male migrants (Kofman & Raghuram, 2018). As a result, there is only limited understanding of the experiences of violence and discrimination against female migrants in their country of origin, during transit and in the destination countries. Moreover, the existing strategies consider gender to be a singular category and completely disregard the intersectionality of gender with other variables such as ethnicity, class, race and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991). This results in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and failure to recognise the diversity in the experiences of female migrants. Additionally, many of the existing methodologies employ quantitative methods that fail to capture the nuances of complex experiences, particularly of sensitive topics such as sexual violence and abuse (Lutz, 2017). One of the frequently used methodologies to study migration and gender in North Africa is the use of questionnaires and surveys. For instance, Gribba and colleagues (2017) utilised a survey involving questions about the women's reasons for migration, their experiences of discrimination and access to healthcare to understand the experiences of women migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa to Tunisia. However, the use of the survey method is limited by the potential for response bias due to its nature of self-reporting. Responses could also have been affected by social desirability bias or acquiescence bias, referring to the tendency to agree with statements. Moreover, the survey design and wording could have also restricted the range of experiences.

Another commonly used methodology to study gendered aspects of migration is ethnographic research. El Hamel (2011) conducted ethnographic research to examine the experiences of migrant women in Morocco who work as domestic workers. The study illustrated a range of challenges faced by the migrant women, including poor working conditions, low pay, and discrimination. Cherti and colleagues (2018) interviewed migrant women in Libya to explore and understand their experiences of sexual violence, exploitation and forced labour. In another study, Belhouari and colleagues (2020) adopted a mixed-methods approach and utilised both surveys and

interviews to explore the experiences of women migrants in Algeria. The study reported that in addition to discrimination, women also face the challenge of limited access to healthcare and education. Although these existent methodologies have contributed to the understanding of the experiences of migrant women in and from the North African region, they also have some limitations. Firstly, most of these methodologies consider women migrants as a homogenous group. For instance, the surveys are often structured to ask questions about the experiences of women migrants as a homogenised group, without any attempt to understand the differences in the experiences of individual women based on factors such as race, class and ethnicity. Bredeloup and Pliez (2014) interviewed only the women migrants from Mali and Senegal and did not consider the experiences of women from other countries. Such homogenisation leads to oversimplification and incomplete understanding of intersectionality in migration experiences. Moreover, in many cases, these methodologies might be heavily influenced by the perspectives of the service providers or researchers. Ethnographic research might be based primarily on the observations of the researcher, leading to the exclusion of the migrant women's perspectives (Al-Ali et. al., 2010). Often, these methodologies may also be incapable of capturing complex gender dynamics. For example, Catani et. al. (2014) interviewed migrant women in the context of their male partners to acknowledge the power dynamics and intersectionality in gender. El-Tayeb (2011), too, interviewed North African women in Europe in the context of their gender but did not fully recognise the role of ethnicity and race in shaping their migration experiences.

Hence, it is crucial to adopt a more intersectional approach to study gender and migration in North Africa as it recognises the ways in which gender intersects with various other factors like race, class and ethnicity in shaping the experiences of migrant women. Moreover, it keeps the perspectives of the women migrants in focus without disproportionately relying on the observations and perspectives of the service providers and researchers.

The Need for New Methodologies

The limitations of the existing methodologies for studying gender and migration highlight the need for more inclusive, community-based and participatory methodologies that capture the diverse experiences of migrant women in and from North Africa. Inclusive methodologies will help broaden the scope of research by including women from diverse social classes, ethnicities and countries (Catani et al., 2014; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Such methodologies will help to acknowledge the heterogeneity in the experiences of migrant women and their intersectionality with multiple other factors (Moser, 1993), thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered aspects of migration. Participatory methodologies would involve collaboration with migrant women at all stages of the research process (Dyck et al., 2017). Involvement of women migrants as active participants makes their perspectives and experiences the focus of the research and amplifies their voices by giving insight into their needs and priorities. Additionally, community-based approaches promote participation of migrant women in the local communities (Tarrius, 2011). Using such methodologies, the researchers will not only be able to gain better insight into the experiences of migrant women but also utilise social support to address their needs and issues. This approach will also allow for the development of more culturally relevant interventions to support migrant women.

New Methodologies for Studying Gender and Migration in the North African Region

Use of traditional methodologies limits the understanding of gender and migration as it is often inadequate in capturing the complexities of gendered aspects of migration. Therefore, there is a need to utilise new methodologies. Participatory action research (PAR), feminist ethnography and digital storytelling are among the new approaches that can be used to study gendered experiences of migration.

PAR involves collaboration between the participants and researchers in the development and implementation of research projects. It promotes active participation and engagement of the members of the community in the process of the research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). The methodology is appropriate to use with marginalised populations as it empowers them by ensuring their active participation to shape the research agendas. The process of PAR is cyclical in nature and involves planning, action and reflection (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This aids the effective evaluation of the findings at every stage (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Participatory action research is centred and grounded in the needs of migrant women. One of the key principles of participatory action research is collaboration and empowerment, achieved by ensuring the active participation of all the stakeholders in all stages of the research. This empowers them by promoting shared decision-making and sufficient representation of their perspectives. Another key principle is action and change. PAR is action-oriented and aims to bring about tangible and sustainable changes in the lives of migrant women. It seeks to identify the root causes of their migration-related challenges and advocates for effective policy changes and community-driven solutions. Another key principle of PAR is reflexivity and knowledge generation. It encourages co-creation of knowledge through continued reflection on the various aspects of research, and generates insights that inform practice as well as theory. Thus, PAR is a useful tool for exploring migration-related gender-based disparity. PAR can be used for gendered needs assessment, thereby contributing to the understanding of the specific needs of men, women and gender-diverse migrants. By initiating a meaningful dialogue between the various stakeholders, PAR can facilitate gender-sensitive policy development in migration contexts. It can also empower migrant men and women by fostering community-led initiatives. An example of the effective use of PAR in the study of gender and migration in the North African region is the research conducted by Amzile et al. (2017). They explored the impact

of migration on the health and wellbeing of migrant women in Morocco. The study actively involved the participants in the design, implementation and dissemination of the research. This offered the women migrants greater control over the research process and ensured appropriate representation of their perspectives. Although PAR emerged in the 1970s from the social movements striving for just societies and liberation in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011), its use in studying gender and migration in North Africa remains sporadic. The experiences of African women migrants are often sidelined (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). Podar (2023) attempted to include the perspectives of African women migrants in Germany. However, they refused to engage in research due to lack of time or previous unpleasant experiences with research. However, Lindsjö et al. (2021) used community-based participatory research in several ways in their research. Firstly, it involved co-creation of an action plan wherein residents and researchers collaborated in future workshops to identify health obstacles and develop solutions for health promotion in the community. Secondly, it involved engaging with marginalised communities. The study recruited lay health promoters who shared similar migration and cultural understanding and background as the participants, to facilitate trust and communication. The story dialogue method was also chosen for the research, modified to suit the needs and limitations of the participants. The study highlighted the experiences of African women migrants, which included social isolation, domestic violence, discrimination and lack of access to health care. Another example of the use of PAR can be seen in the work of Pham (2016). Her research involved creating a dynamic team of social workers, anthropologists, lawyers and Moroccan immigrants. The research began with an informative workshop that led to the creation of a collaborative space for discussion, knowledge sharing and action based on the needs of the immigrants. The research facilitated collective action and fostered a supportive environment

wherein the immigrants could actively authenticate their Muslim identity.

PAR has several benefits. Firstly, it can grant a sense of ownership and empowerment to the community members by active engagement (Zeldin et al., 2003). Secondly, PAR facilitates contextualized and relevant findings which can be particularly helpful in understanding the gendered experiences of migration (Chambers, 1997). Lastly, PAR can facilitate transformative and sustainable changes to address migration-related challenges. Katz (2019) also offers support for PAR as a methodology as it focuses on the voices and experiences of the migrants. However, it is also crucial to understand that PAR does not automatically become a more rigorous or ethical research approach (Abma et al., 2019). It requires constant reflection on representation, positionality, power, relationships and change-oriented action (Muhammad et al., 2015).

Feminist Ethnography is another approach that can prove effective in exploring the gendered aspects of migration. This approach combines ethnographic methods and feminist theories to examine the complex intersectionality of gender with various sociocultural contexts. Rooted in feminist theories, it examines the gender inequalities and aims to rectify them by critically analysing the political, social and economic systems. It also adopts the ethnographic approach of observing, participating in and engaging with a particular culture or community to understand their world. One of the central tenets of feminist ethnography is that it recognises the social construction of gender. Another core principle of feminist ethnography is intersectionality. By emphasising the interconnectedness between gender and other social categories, it examines the multiple forms of privileges, oppression and migration-related experiences. Lastly, reflexivity is also a critical aspect of feminist ethnography, enabling the researchers to challenge their own biases and address their privileges and assumptions by recognising their subjective positionality within the research process. One benefit of feminist

ethnography is the range of methodological approaches that it offers. It encourages the use of narrative analysis and thick descriptions to understand the complexities of gendered experiences of migration and steer away from simplistic and reductionist portrayals of migrant women. In the form of collaborative ethnography, it also involves working closely with the women migrants being studied, fostering nuanced understanding of their experiences. Feminist ethnography can significantly contribute to social change and policy initiatives to address the issue of gendered power dynamics in migration.

One example of feminist ethnography in research is the study by Ghandour and Dhar (2015) exploring the experiences of gender-based violence of Sudanese women migrants in Egypt. By employing narrative analysis, the study highlighted the intersectional dynamics of gender, migration and social exclusion. It further highlights the unique vulnerabilities of women migrants in the North African context. Another notable study that utilises feminist ethnography is that of Horst (2006), exploring the lived experiences of Somali refugees in Dadaab camps in Kenya. Horst explored the agency of men and women in the socio-cultural contexts and gendered aspects of migration utilising a feminist lens. Mingot and Zepeda (2023) used the feminist ethnographic approach to emphasise the importance of reflecting on the researchers' positionality as a member of a mixed team in terms of gender, race and nationality. This awareness helps in the identification of power dynamics and potential biases when working with marginalied populations in crisis contexts. By utilising multi-layered and multi-positioned ethnography, the research helped to generate a richer understanding of the experiences of African migrants in Mexico. This allowed for a more complex analysis and nuanced understanding of the social realities of the participants by considering their crisis context, nationality, race and gender. Further research that holds significant promise in enhancing our understanding of gendered migration experiences and advancing feminist ethnographic methodologies involves the exploration of the experiences

of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco (Stock, 2018). From a feminist perspective, the study challenges the image of the lone ethnographer and highlights the gendered realities of research by openly addressing the challenges of being pregnant while during fieldwork. Its focus on reflexivity, too, aligns with feminist research concerns and strengthens the case for ethical research practices. In the context of migration and gender, the examination of fieldwork through the lens of motherhood offers a nuanced understanding of migration experiences that go beyond economic and political motivations. The methodological contribution of this research involves the encouragement of critical reflexivity. Kynsilehto (2023) utilises multi-sited ethnographic research to explore the strategies of integration utilised by migrants in Morocco. The research highlights the precariousness and uncertainty of the migrants and the lack of a formal framework for integration. The research did not explicitly analyse gendered experiences, but the ethnographic approach contributed to a gendered understanding by highlighting the potential impact on women and family lives.

Digital Storytelling offers another alternative perspective to traditional research methods. Digital storytelling combines personal narratives with multimedia elements such as videos, audios and images (Lambert, 2013). This makes the process participatory and immersive in nature and fosters empathy among viewers (Ohler, 2013). Representation of the personal narratives in the multimedia format fosters cultural understanding and empathy among viewers and enables them to connect with the experiences of the migrants in a profound way (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Rinehart (2016) claims that digital storytelling provides an opportunity to the marginalised to shape their own narratives. It is also a powerful tool for shedding light on the gendered aspects of migration. Smith and Doe (2019) highlighted the complex intersections of cultural norms, gender and migration in the experiences of female migrants from North Africa using digital storytelling. The immersive storytelling experience of digital storytelling helps to dispel misconceptions and

challenges stereotypes. It also humanises the experiences of women migrants. Ahmed and Gonzalez (2020) also utilised digital storytelling to examine the experiences of transgender migrants in the North Africa region. This served as a powerful medium through which transgender migrants could advocate for their rights, challenge social norms and spread awareness about their unique challenges and aspirations. Shufutinsky (2021) explored the cultural erasure of MENA Jewish communities in academia by utilising digital storytelling. The research highlighted their unique experiences of migration and displacement and also highlighted the experiences of women migrants through digital platforms. Although very little research has attempted to explore the issue of gendered experiences in and from North Africa, several other examples highlight the potential of this methodology to voice the experiences of women and other gender minorities. For instance, Kendrick et al. (2022) conducted thematic content analysis of digital stories, wherein stopping violence against women and promoting gender equality emerged as a prominent theme. The use of digital storytelling in this research brings personal stories to life and fosters empathy by highlighting the complex emotions of fear, anger, love, trust and freedom of the women migrants, who were primarily from Syria, Nepal, Afghanistan, El Salvador and Iraq.

Ethical and Practical Considerations

There are certain ethical and practical considerations associated with using PAR, digital storytelling and feminist ethnography to study the gendered aspects of migration. One of the most important ethical considerations is obtaining informed consent from all participants. When using PAR in the context of gender and migration, it is of the utmost importance that the consent procedures consider power differentials, potential coercion and language barriers, and are culturally sensitive (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Researchers must also be aware of their own privileges and positionality in

relation to the participants to address any power differentials and promote an environment of inclusivity (Brown & Garcia, 2020). Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in PAR is also of utmost importance, for which the researchers must develop appropriate protocols for storing and anonymising information of the participants (Martinez et al., 2019). One of the practical considerations while using PAR involves building collaborative partnerships with migrant communities and ensure that the research aligns with community needs and partnerships (Nguyen & Smith, 2022). While using PAR one must also consider providing training and capacity building initiatives that can enhance the participants' skills and knowledge about data collection, analysis and interpretation (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Lastly, while using PAR, researchers must involve the participants in careful analysis and interpretation of the data to validate the findings. Also, they must disseminate the research outcomes in formats that are accessible to relevant stakeholders, to empower communities and foster knowledge exchange (Wilson & Smith, 2019).

Similarly, informed consent should also be obtained when using digital storytelling as a methodology to study gendered aspects of migration (Banks & Deuze, 2009). Participants should be aware of the level of confidentiality provided and must have the option of withdrawing their participation at any stage of the research process. To maintain confidentiality, the participants must also be encouraged to use aliases or pseudonyms instead of their real names. In the case of visual content, options to blur or alter the visuals must be available to ensure anonymity (Denzin, 2003). Moreover, the participants must be encouraged to share the broader aspects of their migration experiences and must be discouraged from sharing specific details like addresses, workplace and names that might reveal their identity. Secure digital platforms that prioritise user privacy, data protection and encryption must be selected for sharing the digital stories. Moreover, it is crucial to state the clear guidelines for data storage and date retention, including the duration for which

the data will be retained. The researchers must also adhere to the data protection laws of the state. Researchers must also prioritise the wellbeing of the participants and take measures to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation (McLellan & Eldred, 2015). To that end, the researchers must adopt a trauma-informed approach that will guide their interaction with the participants. It is crucial to develop trauma-sensitive interview questions and create a safe environment for the participants to share their experiences. Psychoeducational materials on trauma and coping strategies should be shared with the participants to prepare them for potential emotional reactions that might arise during the research process. To use digital storytelling as a methodology, the researchers must also consider the extent of internet access, availability of technology and digital literacy skills among the participants of the study. They must make efforts to bridge the digital divide by offering access to various resources, training and support (Pitkänen & Soila-Wadman, 2017).

Ethical and practical considerations are also crucial for utilising feminist ethnography to study gendered aspects of migration. Researchers must develop a clear understanding of their social location, power dynamics and their own biases. They must critically reflect on the influence of their own positionality on the research process and interpretation of the findings (Harding, 2015). Adopting an intersectional lens to examine the complex interplay of factors such as sexuality, nationality, race and class is also crucial to the use of feminist ethnography (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, researchers must actively seek guidance from ethical guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association to resolve any ethical dilemmas and address any power imbalances between the participants and the researcher (APA, 2017).

By considering these ethical and practical considerations, it is possible for researchers to study the gendered aspects of migration in the North African region in a manner that respects the rights of the participants, promotes social justice and contributes to the nuanced understanding of the gendered migration experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Significant transformations have occurred in the study of gender and migration in North Africa with the emergence of new methodologies such as PAR, digital storytelling and feminist ethnography. Building on the strengths of these methodologies, the following recommendations for future research may be made.

Researchers must engage in co-design and co-production of research objectives, methods and outcomes by involving women migrants and other relevant stakeholders. This would foster a sense of ownership and increase the applicability of the findings in the local context. With the help of these methodologies, the researchers must also try to foster ongoing dialogue between the migrant women and participants. Future research must also centre the voices and experiences of women migrants. Moreover, future research must also focus on inclusivity by adopting an intersectional approach, amplifying the marginalised voices of women and other gender minorities. Finally, the research designs for future research must strictly adhere to ethical guidelines and prioritise a culturally sensitive approach to research.

Conclusion

The present chapter explores new methodologies for studying gender and migration in the North African region and offers a fresh lens through which the multifaceted and complex topic of gender and migration could be approached. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of women migrants. The new methodologies offer scope for moving beyond the gender binaries and exploring the intersectionality within the gendered experiences of migration. This offers several promising directions for future research in the field of gender and migration in the North African region. Future research should be collaborative, participatory, culturally sensitive, intersectional and inclusive

so as to develop a better understanding of the uniquely gendered experiences of migration.

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Chapter 4

Navigating Lives: The Impact of Men's Gulf Migration on "Left-Behind" Women in India's Changing Landscape

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Abstract

Indians are the largest expatriate population in Western Asia, with a diaspora of around 8.5 million people, as a result of the movement of unskilled and semi-skilled work force from India, mainly to the Gulf region. This trend, which began in the 1970s following the discovery of oil, has had a transformative effect on the social fabric of both the migrant households and their families left behind in India. Several studies have examined male migration and role of family structures in changing the lives of "left-behind" women. This chapter aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the role of socio-economic change, particularly digital advancement and technology, in shaping the agency and autonomy of the women who were left behind. By incorporating the current aspects of technological advancement, a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of these left-behind women can be achieved. Drawing on existing studies, this chapter aims to critically analyse the effects of male migration on family dynamics and to underscore the significance of technology in reshaping the lives of left-behind women. Migration patterns from across India will be examined to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this chapter will contribute to the ongoing discourse on migration

and family dynamics by emphasising the role of technology. By exploring how digital advancement has influenced the agency and autonomy of left-behind women, this research will shed light on the nuanced and complex relationship between migration, family structure changes and technology. The findings of this study have implications for policymakers, researchers and practitioners interested in understanding the multifaceted impact of migration and technology on the lives of women in transnational settings.

Keywords: Migration, left-behind women, digital advancement, autonomy, agency

Introduction

Migration has long played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic landscape of nations worldwide. In the context of India, a country with a rich and diverse history, the phenomenon of migration has evolved significantly over the decades. Historically characterised by the departure of male breadwinners seeking employment opportunities abroad, India's migration narrative is inexorably intertwined with remittances and economic sustenance. As Tumbe rightly pointed out, "India's migration story is male-dominated, and remittance yielding" (Tumbe, 2018). This chapter delves into the intricate dimensions of male Gulf migration and its reverberating impact on the women left behind in the rapidly evolving terrain of contemporary India.

Historical Context of Gulf Migration

The historical tapestry of Indian migration to the Gulf region is a narrative that has woven itself into the annals of time. During the late 19th century, the seeds of Gulf migration were sown, as Indian individuals embarked on journeys to distant lands in pursuit of economic opportunities. The initial waves of migration were modest in scale, often driven by factors such as labour shortages in the Gulf region and the economic prospects presented by the global market. The economic incentives that spurred these early pioneers to venture to the

Gulf laid the groundwork for a migration pattern that would come to define India's engagement with the world economy.

However, the momentum of this migration trend dwindled in the decades that followed, particularly during the 1930s when global economic conditions became less conducive to labour migration. Yet, these early forays into international labour markets marked the beginning of a historical connection between India and the Gulf that would prove resilient and enduring.

It was not until 1991, with the advent of economic liberalisation in India, that the embers of Gulf migration were rekindled into a blazing furnace of opportunity. The policies of economic liberalisation opened new avenues for Indian workers, particularly in the semi-skilled and skilled categories, to seek employment in the Gulf. This period witnessed a significant surge in migration to Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait.

Central to this resurgence was the high demand for Indian labour in the Gulf region. The willingness of Indian workers to undertake low-paid and often unskilled roles in the face of limited local workforce availability played a pivotal role in cementing their presence in the Gulf's employment landscape. As the Gulf economies prospered and expanded, Indian migrants became indispensable contributors to their growth. The following table shows the distribution of Indians in the GCC countries. According to the latest data from MEA, the UAE hosts the highest number of Indian migrants, while Bahrain hosts the lowest number among all the GCC countries.

Table 1: Distribution of Indians in the GCC countries

GCC	**Population in millions (Approx)**
UAE	3.55
Saudi Arabia	2.21
Kuwait	0.82
Qatar	0.80

GCC	Population in millions (Approx)
Oman	0.53
Bahrain	0.32

(Source: Ministry of External Affairs, 2023)

Changing Regional Migration Patterns

Since most of the unskilled and semi-skilled Indian workforce migrate to the GCC, they constitute approximately 70 percent of the construction industry labour force as cleaners, domestic servants and drivers (Kumar & Mehra, 2023). Rural India is the most significant provider of labour to the GCC. The question then arises: why do most Indian emigrants to the Gulf hail from rural areas rather than urban centres? This phenomenon can be attributed to several intersecting factors. Rural populations, often facing limited economic prospects domestically, are drawn to the Gulf's promise of employment and remuneration. The willingness of rural individuals to undertake low-paid and unskilled roles aligns with the labour demands of Gulf countries. Furthermore, the prevalence of rural-to-urban migration within India serves as a parallel precursor to the Gulf exodus, as individuals with rural backgrounds are already familiar with migration as a means of livelihood improvement. Geographical proximity is another contributing factor to the huge exodus of the rural workforce to the Gulf (Kumar, 2023).

The dynamics of Gulf migration within India have undergone a significant transformation over the years, reshaping the regional landscape of emigration. Historically, states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were the dominant sources of Gulf migration, contributing substantial numbers of emigrants. However, a discernible shift has occurred in recent times, with states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal emerging as new hubs for Gulf-bound emigration (Singh & Arimbra, 2019). This transformation is indicative of a larger trend that reflects evolving economic

opportunities, changing demographics and shifting socio-economic factors within India. The following table and figure represent the changing trends in regional emigration to the GCC.

Table 2: The changing trends in regional emigration to the GCC

State	**2009**	**2019**
Uttar Pradesh	125548	86 273
Bihar	50 162	59 181
Tamil Nadu	77 665	31 588
Kerala	1.19188	14 496
Andhra Pradesh	14 023	15 528
West Bengal	21 177	28 648

Source: MEA-2020 (Number of blue-collar workers based on Passport ECR clearance)

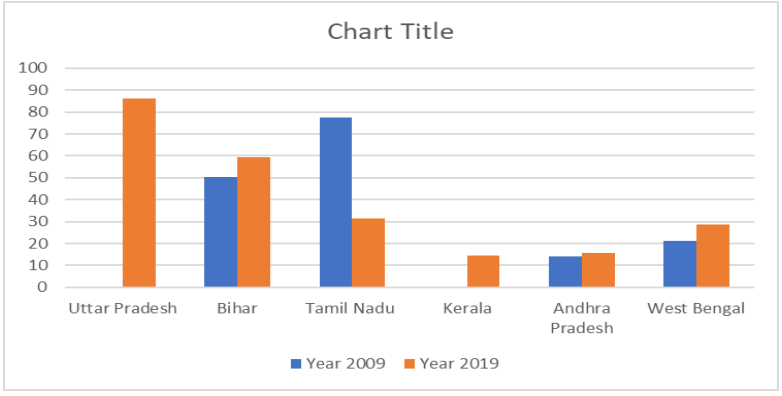

Figure 1: The numbers are in thousand. Source: MEA Data 2022

Economic Impact of Gulf Migration

Remittances have long been a critical component of India's economic landscape, contributing significantly to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Primarily sourced from the Indian diaspora employed in Gulf countries, these monetary inflows serve as a cornerstone of economic stability and growth for India**.** Gulf remittances are a lifeline for countless households, providing financial support for essential needs, education, healthcare and even investments in small businesses.

Remittances wield significant influence at the micro level, impacting villages, households and families. Their judicious use goes beyond ensuring food security, leading to lasting enhancements in living standards, encompassing improved access to education, healthcare and housing, ultimately elevating overall wellbeing. This multifaceted impact extends to economic, sociocultural and human development dimensions at the micro level.

In 2021, India received remittances worth $89.4 billion, as reported by the World Bank's "Remittances Brave Global Headwinds" report (World Bank Group, 2022). However, a noteworthy shift has occurred in the sources of these remittances. Historically, five GCC countries played a dominant role, contributing 54% of the total remittances. However, this share dwindled to 28% in recent years. This decline is significant, marking a pivotal shift in India's remittance landscape (ibid).

The Reserve Bank of India's fifth round of Survey on Remittances corroborates the decline in the GCC's share of India's inward remittances. It reveals that the proportion of remittances originating from the GCC region, which exceeded 50% in 2016–17, has now declined to approximately 30% in 2020–21. This decline reflects changing economic conditions and migration patterns in the Gulf region. The following table shows the latest Gulf-sourced inbound remittances to India, in which UAE holds the first place followed by the USA.

Table 3: Country-wise Share in Inward Remittances, 2020-21

Country	Share in Total Remittance %
UAE	18.0
Saudi Arabia	5.1
Kuwait	2.4
Oman	1.6
Qatar	1.5

(Source: Ministry of Finance, 2023)

Migration from Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal to Gulf countries has witnessed a notable surge in recent years. The Ministry of External Affairs data underscores this shift, with more than 50% of approved emigration clearances for the GCC region in 2020 originating from these states. The reasons for this trend can be attributed to various factors, including job opportunities, demand for labour and socio-economic conditions in these states.

Left-Behind Women: The oft-neglected social side of migration regarding women and their coping mechanisms

The term "left behind", commonly employed to refer to the wives of male migrants, carries a connotation of a male-centred perspective that follows the man during his migration for work (Jain & Jayaram, 2022). Left-behind women are often considered as "dependents" of the remittances, which questions the agency and autonomy of the women. Existing patriarchal norms are the major cause of the marginalised state of Indian women. Furthermore, a complex interplay of socio-economic factors, including limited economic opportunities, traditional gender roles, and conservative norms prevalent in rural communities, exacerbate the marginalization of women. This contributes to restricted access to education, limited

decision-making authority within the household, and a lack of economic independence.

While male emigration often brings economic benefits to families in their places of origin, it is essential to recognise the social costs, which are frequently overlooked. Male emigration significantly influences the physical, economic, and social aspects of the lives of left-behind women (Lei & Desai, 2021). The existing literature falls short of providing a comprehensive framework for analysing these transformations. The impact on left-behind women is multifaceted, with both positive and negative aspects.

In her seminal work, Lila Gulati explored the gendered impact of male emigration to the Gulf and its impact on left-behind women. The migration-induced absence of husbands has engendered a profound paradigm shift in the lives of women left behind. The presence of male family members abroad requires women to undertake novel roles and responsibilities, spanning both intra- and extra-household domains. These transformative changes have brought about psychological consequences, marked most notably by a sense of loneliness among wives left in their homeland. The psychological burden is compounded by the stress stemming from financial challenges and the imperative to shoulder supplementary familial roles in the absence of their husbands, thus underscoring the multifaceted impact of male emigration on these women's lives (Gulati, 1998).

These multifaceted consequences underscore the intricate web of effects engendered by male migration on the lives of these women. Such effects extend to reshaping gender roles and responsibilities, thereby reconfiguring the socio-cultural landscape within which these women navigate their daily lives (Malik, 1993).

Some research has indicated a positive impact of migration on left-behind women. Male migration fosters a positive sender perspective from abroad, driving a beneficial shift in women's roles within traditional communities. This results in increased involvement in external employment,

enhanced mobility, better healthcare access, greater participation in reproductive choices, and reduced domestic violence (Hadi, 2001).

Left-behind women have become the de facto heads of households, taking on decision-making responsibilities, managing finances, and ensuring the well-being of their families. This newfound autonomy is not merely a consequence of choice but arises out of necessity.

Education and exposure to global and trans-border norms have played pivotal roles in the transformation of traditional gender roles (Uddin, 2022). The advances in educational opportunities, coupled with exposure to global values through digital media, has led to a shift in mindset among women. They have realised the importance of acquiring skills and knowledge to navigate the challenges of life without their husbands. As a result, women have sought education and skills development opportunities, empowering themselves in the process.

The necessity of women shouldering responsibilities becomes even more pronounced when there are no other able-bodied male family members present. In such scenarios, women step into roles traditionally reserved for men, participating in income-generating activities such as farming, and even taking on leadership roles in their communities (Gulati, 1998).

However, it is essential to recognise that male-dominated migration causes psychological effects that extend beyond economic contributions. The absence of husbands and fathers due to migration can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and emotional strain among left-behind women and their families. These psychological impacts manifest as stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, influencing interpersonal dynamics within the household.

Research findings have generally indicated positive outcomes in the context of male migration on women, although the manifestation of these outcomes is contingent upon an intricate interplay of various factors within the

home country. Socioeconomic variables such as class, caste, religion and social status, alongside localised factors such as village norms and literacy rates, collectively shape the degree of women's autonomy and agency. Additionally, familial structures prevalent in society exert a significant influence, either facilitating or impeding women's empowerment in response to male migration (Hadi, 2001; Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Koirala, 2023)

Changing Family Structure and Gender Roles

Traditionally, India has been characterised by a strong emphasis on the joint family structure, where extended families lived together under a single roof, sharing resources, responsibilities and decision-making. However, this traditional model has undergone a significant evolution in response to changing socio-economic dynamics. Factors such as increased access to education, exposure to global norms, and the rise of individual income sources have contributed to a shift towards nuclear and single-family structures.

Education has emerged as a key catalyst for change, empowering individuals with knowledge and skills, enabling them to pursue opportunities beyond their immediate communities. As educational attainment levels have risen, especially among women, there has been a growing inclination towards nuclear family units. Education equips individuals with the tools to make informed decisions about their lives, including family structure and gender roles.

Globalisation, facilitated by advances in communication and technology, has further reshaped family structures and gender roles. Trans-border communication plays a pivotal role in connecting Indian families with their loved ones working abroad. This increased connectivity has fostered a more positive sender perspective from abroad, where women left behind often gain greater autonomy, engage in external employment, access better healthcare and participate more actively in reproductive choices. This shift has paved the way

for a more inclusive and balanced approach to gender roles within traditional communities.

Complex Nature of Impact

The impact of male migration on left-behind women is not a monolithic narrative but a complex tapestry woven with diverse threads. Studies exploring this phenomenon have yielded a spectrum of findings, often revealing contradictions and variations. While some women have experienced increased autonomy and empowerment in the absence of their husbands, others have faced challenges and vulnerabilities.

Regional variations play a significant role in shaping these diverse experiences. Women's encounters with migration-related changes depend on their geographical location, caste and socio-economic status. For instance, in regions with high emigration rates like Kerala, women left behind have often taken on leadership roles and enjoyed greater autonomy. In contrast, in other regions like Uttarakhand or Jharkhand, the outcomes have been less favourable (Roy, 2011), with women assuming increased responsibilities but lacking decision-making power.

Although less frequently discussed, the regional aspect of gender norms is also crucial in the impact and outcome of left-behind women's lives after male emigration from the household. Throughout India, the experiences of women left behind following male emigration exhibit notable variations, largely contingent on the prevailing status and societal roles attributed to women within specific regions. In regions such as Kerala, characterised by high emigration rates, a significant proportion of women have effectively assumed the role of household leaders. This newfound position has afforded them greater autonomy in decision-making processes, yielding more favourable overall outcomes for their families (Jain, 2020).

In contrast, within an Uttarakhand village, women left behind find themselves in a distinctly different situation.

They do not exert control over any tangible assets but bear the responsibility of managing household chores, childcare, farming and animal husbandry. While they hold relatively more influence within the household, their participation in village meetings remains comparatively limited.

A starkly different scenario emerges in the villages of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, where women are the most severely impacted by male emigration. In this context, they shoulder the entirety of the workload, yet find themselves bereft of decision-making authority. Consequently, they are compelled to rely on male members of the extended family, which does not add to their social status and autonomy (Roy, 2011; Neha, 2022).

In examining the autonomy of women left behind in the context of male emigration, it becomes evident that household dynamics undergo substantial reconfiguration in response to the absence of male family members.

Among upper-class women residing within joint family systems, dependence on male household members tends to be more pronounced. In contrast, lower-class women, residing in nuclear family settings, assume pivotal roles in decision-making processes, resulting in heightened autonomy and agency (Uddin, 2022). A study by Sonalde and Banerji in 2008 unveiled a nuanced narrative of women's agency and autonomy predicated on class and family structure. Left-behind women cite the example of Bihar, where they would often find themselves accompanied by elderly women or male members of the household, thereby altering the nature of their autonomy. Nearly 34% of women cohabiting with their husbands had older female family members in the household. This proportion significantly increased to 56% among women whose husbands were migrant labourers (Desai & Banerji, 2008).

The interplay of class and caste in India also significantly shapes the agency and autonomy of women left behind. For instance, upper-caste Hindu women tend to have a lower likelihood of living independently compared to their

lower-caste Dalit counterparts. This divergence in living arrangements results in varying degrees of autonomy and increased work responsibilities, particularly for Dalit women.

The intricate relationship between women's autonomy and societal norms further complicates the assessment of impact. While migration has, in some cases, led to the empowerment of women, the deeply ingrained norms and expectations within Indian society can act as both enablers and barriers. Women may gain autonomy out of necessity, but societal norms may still limit the extent of their decision-making power. This dynamic underscores the complex interplay between personal agency and the wider cultural context.

Digital Advancement and Changing Landscape: Agency, Autonomy, Decision-Making

Advancements in digital technology have ushered in a new era, reshaping the landscape of migration patterns and communication channels between migrants and their families. The advent of smartphones, widespread internet access and social media platforms has facilitated real-time, borderless connectivity. This has significantly altered the dynamics of migration, enabling migrants to stay closely connected with their loved ones despite geographical distances.

One of the most notable implications of these digital advancements is the transformation of migration patterns. Migrants are no longer isolated from their families during their journeys. They can maintain constant contact, providing reassurance and support to their families back home. Digital communication has even influenced decisions regarding migration destinations, as migrants seek locations with better connectivity to stay connected with their families.

Left-behind women have emerged as beneficiaries of this digital revolution. The increased autonomy and agency afforded by digital technology are noteworthy. Women now have access to a wealth of information and resources at their

fingertips. They can independently seek information on a wide range of topics, from healthcare to financial management. This access to information empowers them to make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

Furthermore, digital platforms have opened up new avenues for income generation and skill development. Left-behind women can participate in remote work opportunities, online education and e-commerce ventures. This economic empowerment not only enhances their financial independence but also elevates their social status within their communities.

The ability to access social media and online communities provides left-behind women with a support network beyond their immediate surroundings. They connect with others facing similar challenges, share experiences and seek advice. This virtual sisterhood fosters a sense of solidarity and resilience, bolstering their overall well-being.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the digital divide remains a challenge. While advancements in digital technology have brought about positive changes, not all left-behind women have equal access to these resources. Disparities in access to smartphones, internet connectivity and digital literacy persist, particularly in rural and marginalised communities.

The concept of the "digital divide" has gained significant attention, and there are now active efforts being made to reduce it. The development of the mobile phone, which stands out as being more affordable than other technical mediums, appears to be making a significant contribution to the closing of this gap. Mobile phone access is becoming a more important component of measures used to close this gap (Garg, 2021).

An interesting finding from an empirical study of a Chinese village is that the presence of migrant spouses is positively correlated with increased household decision-making autonomy among women who are left behind, which helps to reduce gender-based power disparities in homes. The study also emphasises the critical role played by left-behind women's use of mobile phones, notably in enhancing their

influence in household decision-making processes. These observations highlight the complex relationships between gender, migration and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use, highlighting the potential for ICT interventions to promote gender equality in situations where male spouse mobility is a factor (Zheng & Lu, 2021).

Within the Indian context, the discourse on the impact of ICT on women's agency and autonomy reflects a multifaceted landscape. While a predominant body of research suggests positive outcomes, it is important to recognise that contradictory viewpoints exist. These perspectives draw attention to the potential challenges and negative consequences that can emerge for left-behind women through ICT adoption.

In their research, Masika and Bailur (2015) found that the adoption of ICT by women is frequently closely related to their ideas of how such technologies could either challenge or support pre-existing gender norms. Taking notes from rural India, they emphasised the notions of "adaptive preference" and a "patriarchal bargain" to explain why women choose to embrace or reject ICT. Adaptive preferences denote the phenomenon wherein individuals, without explicit awareness, alter their inclinations in response to unattainable circumstances. This involves an automatic adjustment of one's aspirations, manifesting as a subconscious downgrading of preferences when faced with inaccessible choices (Elster, 1985).

The concept of "patriarchal bargain", as outlined by Kandiyoti, involves women employing strategic approaches within specific limitations. These limitations are characterised by an overly rigid perception of male dominance, which must be dismantled to comprehend the intricate dynamics of gender relationships shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In the course of their research, Masika and Bailur (2015) gathered responses from individuals exemplifying the negotiation of life through the paradigms of Adaptive

Preferences and Patriarchal Bargains. One respondent, emphasising the concept of maximising options, articulated, "Here in Bangalore, I am more free. I can do what I want". This expression highlights the expansion of freedom facilitated by the acquisition of ICT skills and through marriage, strategically undertaken to enhance autonomy within the socio-cultural context.

Another respondent stated, "If my brother did not come, I would not be able to come. My parents see so many boys here, and it is not normal for boys and girls to mix together freely". These narratives shed light on how individuals strategically shape their choices within the constraints of societal norms, offering insights into the nuanced interplay of gender dynamics within the context of Adaptive Preferences and Patriarchal Bargains in India.

This dual exploration of adaptive preferences and patriarchal bargains, as evidenced by these responses, enhances the understanding of how women in India negotiate their lives amidst the complex interplay of cultural norms, adaptive strategies, and aspirations for expanded freedom within diverse societal frameworks (Masika & Bailur, 2015).

In the pursuit of comprehending the influence of ICT and digital progress on the agency of "left-behind" women, a fundamental prerequisite is the comprehensive examination of their engagement with digital devices. Notably, among the spectrum of digital devices, the mobile phone emerges as a salient instrument, characterised by its exceptional usability and accessibility to women. Therefore, the pivotal role played by mobile phones in shaping the digital interactions and empowerment of these women becomes a subject of particular interest and significance.

Mobile phone penetration among rural women, characterised by the convergence of gender inequities and illiteracy, is a critical component in the effort to understand the ramifications of digital advances. It is critical to have a thorough awareness of both the scope and justification for their use of mobile phones. In order to obtain insight into the

multidimensional function of digital advances in their lives, it is critical to explore the methods through which women in such situations acquire and deploy this technology, as well as the underlying reasons that drive their usage patterns.

Intriguing research by Garg (2021) into rural, illiterate women in India showed a surprising pattern, with almost 85% of the population showing usage of mobile phones, without necessarily owning the device themselves. Surprisingly, they began using their mobile phones as their main and fastest source of communication and information gathering. This finding highlights the cell phone's potential as a tool for technology rural development projects. This little portable gadget has almost universal accessibility among women in rural regions, a group who are frequently in charge of taking care of the family's daily needs, including those related to health and education (Garg, 2021). Left-behind India women use mobile phones more for organising their lives and maintaining relationships.

Women predominantly employed the mobile phone as a means to sustain communication with their familial networks, encompassing both immediate and extended relations, a discernment consonant with prior research findings. As elucidated by Macueve et al. (2009), the fortification of familial bonds and support structures emerges as a consistent outcome resulting from the routine use of mobile phones by women, irrespective of geographical distances. This empirical evidence underscores the enduring significance of the mobile phone as a tool for nurturing and preserving familial connections, aligning with the scholarly discourse on the subject. The findings reaffirm the pivotal role of mobile communication in engendering and sustaining familial linkages within contemporary sociotechnical contexts.

The mobile phone emerges as a tool empowering women to make informed decisions, not only in their caregiving roles but also across various domains of significant decision-making. Notably, the phenomenon of male emigration has compelled many women to shoulder

multifaceted responsibilities, encompassing both domestic and external facets, including matters pertaining to household management, health, education and financial affairs. Within this context, the mobile phone assumes a salient role, facilitating access to information and resources essential for well-informed decision-making, thereby bolstering women's agency. This dynamic underscores the transformative influence of mobile technology in equipping women with the capabilities required to navigate the complexities of their expanded roles, transcending traditional boundaries and augmenting their capacity to engage in critical decision-making processes.

Conclusion

This chapter has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted repercussions stemming from male emigration to the Gulf on left-behind women in India. The analysis has illuminated various dimensions of this phenomenon, encompassing economic contributions, shifting family structures, evolving gender roles, the empowerment facilitated by digital advancements, and the inherent complexities involved in assessing these outcomes.

Key findings underscore the transformative role of male Gulf migration, manifesting in substantial economic contributions to India's GDP and regional disparities in remittance distribution. Additionally, the chapter has elucidated the evolution of family structures, where women increasingly bear responsibilities and experience heightened autonomy. Notably, digital advancements have emerged as a catalyst for empowerment, amplifying women's access to information, and informed decision-making.

To comprehensively address the challenges and opportunities encountered by left-behind women, future research should delve deeper into regional variations and the intricate interplay between societal norms and women's agency. Furthermore, policymakers are urged to consider targeted interventions aimed at bridging the digital divide,

thereby ensuring equitable technology access and fostering gender equality within society.

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Chapter 5

Diaspora Diplomacy: Conflict Resolution through Informal Ties

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Abstract

Diplomacy is traditionally seen as a task for ambassadors and other officials who act as representatives to facilitate and maintain government-to-government communication. Modern statesmanship is much broader and diaspora communities play a significant role in generating and maintaining dialogue. The networks that develop between receiving and sending countries provide informal avenues for mutual understanding and shared experiences to build bridges between diverse peoples and cultures. In addition to official relationships, links produce broad interactions that allow misunderstandings—caused by linguistic or cultural differences—to be overcome. When diplomacy works, new partnerships develop and there are avenues to de-escalate tensions and misunderstandings. The networks that emerge through diasporas build important bridges between the host and home country and provide a means to acquire connections to enhance political, cultural and economic connections. When individuals travel to the Middle East, they maintain communication with colleagues at home when they share their experiences and facilitate interaction. Social media allows one's experiences to be shared with thousands—when someone is helped or treated unfairly, many people hear of it and this becomes

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the basis for how they perceive the recipient country. Diaspora networks build bridges that allow communication to take place much more broadly than through official relationships.

Cultural Exchange and Dialogue

When many individuals from the same nation move to a foreign place to live and work, they face many challenges that impact on their identity. Immigrants have always had to walk a fine line between assimilating into their new home and keeping their cultural identity intact. In American history, nineteenth century government policies sought to eliminate the immigrants' cultural heritage and tie their identity to the United States. The newly-arrived residents would often speak only English in an effort to make life easier for the next generations. In other words, it was a zero-sum game. The immigrants would give up their cultural uniqueness and language to better fit in to a new culture. Cultural identity was sacrificed in the name of assimilation. Even when diaspora communities gave up their ethnic heritage, the broader American communities reacted negatively to their presence.

In the West today, immigration is a divisive issue due to the changes they bring to the local market. The indigenous non-skilled workers bear the economic costs as immigrants accept lower wages and work longer hours. As a result, citizens have become resentful of immigrants and blame them for unemployment and a lack of social mobility. Governments have also tried to limit immigration and allow migrants only in special circumstances, often giving preferential treatment to individuals from countries that were deemed to be relatively close to the host country's culture. Unless there is a demographic or economic need for immigrants, diaspora communities may generate resentment from people whose livelihoods are jeopardised by the new residents.

Beginning after World War II, immigration patterns began to change. Governments were still skeptical of allowing many immigrants in, especially since they were often worried about their impact on the economy. However, immigrant

populations began to be less concerned with assimilation and more concerned with retaining their own cultural identities. While diasporas had often retained close ties within their own communities, the new era of immigration led to diasporas focusing on being the arbiters of original culture and working to preserve that culture. While leaders and diasporas would often still urge their fellow immigrants to try to understand the culture of the host nation, they also began to push to keep their local culture alive.

One example of a diaspora that tried to keep its culture alive was the Russian immigrant community in San Francisco, California. While many of the children of immigrants refused to try to speak or learn to speak Russian, the adults continued with cultural traditions, speaking the language, and often telling their children that they would one day be proud of their heritage. One result of this was the establishment of the museum of Russian culture in San Francisco, which opened its doors not only to the immigrant community, but also welcomed people from other cultures to learn about Russian culture, language, religion and history.

The Russian diaspora was often very vocal on political issues, especially those related to defeating communism. Many of those in the Russian diaspora had emigrated during the Russian revolution and civil war and were eager to fight the communists in the Soviet Union. They did this through lobbying politicians and making sure that the history of communist repressions was understood in the United States. Politicians, in turn, were happy to speak to the Russians to advance their own agenda. They were less interested in learning about Russian culture and identity than they were in advancing their objective of fighting communist ideology. Nevertheless, Russian culture and history did make a big impression on the intellectual community in the United States. For example, Russian literature, ballet and classical music gained tremendous popularity, as did the tragedy of the end

of the Romanov dynasty.[3] Our chapter will illustrate how diaspora communities contribute to the diplomatic service of their country—in this example, the Russian population in America helped to discredit communism and advance U.S. interests during the Cold War.

A more recent example of the symbiotic relationship between diasporas and diplomacy occurred in the 1990s, when US President Bill Clinton met with many leaders of Eastern European diasporas to try to earn their support for the Democratic Party. One of the issues that he realised would endear him to the diasporas was the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe. Since the end of the Cold War meant that the Soviet Union was no longer a threat to the United States, expanding NATO seemed like a low-cost means of securing the support of Eastern European diasporas in domestic politics. Thus, Clinton pushed to expand NATO into Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, the diasporas of those countries supported Clinton and helped to propel him to a second term in office.[4]

Some states have been able to use diasporas to influence the domestic politics in other countries. For example, Russia has used the Russian diaspora in the Baltic states to influence public policy there and to affect change related to policy towards the diaspora. This is especially true for issues like language use and teaching language and culture in public schools.[5]

Few studies have examined the role of diasporas in helping host countries resolve conflicts. However, diasporas

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play an especially important role in track-two diplomacy—the term refers to unofficial or ill-defined groups of adversarial states who attempt to find strategies and influence public opinion to solve conflicts.[6] This activity is not carried out by official diplomats, but by informed citizens who are well-placed to find solutions to problems or who are able to impact public opinion. Diaspora communities are particularly good at carrying out track-two diplomacy by being able to bridge the conflicting sides and by sharing their discussion with government officials. The national communities working in foreign states have incentives to find solutions to disputes and are well-placed to contribute because they have connections on both sides. There have been efforts during the Ukraine war to use members of the Russian diaspora, specifically those who had emigrated from Russia in recent years, to try to create back-channel communications with the Russian government. Diasporas play a vital role in creating those ties and providing opportunities for conflict resolution that regular diplomacy cannot possibly provide.

The use of diasporas not only provides plausible deniability in any negotiation, but the diasporas themselves can be used as sounding boards to see if certain proposals will be palatable in trying to reduce conflict. For example, the Indian diaspora in the United Arab Emirates can be used by the UAE to see if certain proposals would meet with approval in New Delhi. Further, if a diaspora is mistreated by a host country, that can lead to increased tensions between the host country and the country from which the diaspora came. The Indian diaspora in the UAE increases the incentives for New Delhi to strengthen and sustain its relationship with the UAE.

6 Track two diplomacy is somewhat challenging to define because all ad hoc networks where it has occurred are unique and often not repeated. For a good summary of Track Two diplomacy see: Jones, Peter (2015). Track Two Diplomacy in Theory and Practice. United States: Stanford University Press.

The Indian diaspora in the UAE comprises approximately 30% of the total population of the UAE.[7] There are many social and cultural organisations specifically geared towards the Indian diaspora. Due to the size of the diaspora and its various social and cultural organisations, cooperation has occurred between the government in the UAE and the Indian diaspora, as well as the Indian Embassy in the UAE, to create a special organisation that will uphold the rights of Indian workers within the UAE. This trilateral cooperation is necessary to avoid the human rights violations such as those which happened to Indian migrant workers in Qatar prior to the World Cup in 2022.[8] The plight of migrant Indian workers in Qatar caused relations between India and Qatar to sour. However, the UAE has been able to better manage Indian workers by collaborating closely with the Indian diaspora as well as the Indian Embassy.

The strength of the Indian diaspora in the UAE is a great example of how governments can work in tandem with diasporas to achieve peaceful relations and good diplomacy. By cooperating with the diasporas as well as with foreign governments, a second-tier diplomacy system is established, which in turn facilitates communication and ultimately serves to prevent conflict.

Vienna Convention and Diaspora Diplomacy

The diaspora populations build networks that assist in both the sending and host countries foreign ministry. In addition to track-two diplomacy, which is unofficial but direct, there are multiple ways in which immigrant communities can work to provide vital assistance to ambassadors and other accredited representatives of their home country.

7 Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. (indembassyuae.gov.in)

8 Babar, Z., & Vora, N. (2022). The 2022 World Cup and migrants' rights in Qatar: Racialised labour hierarchies and the influence of racial capitalism. *The Political Quarterly*, *93*(3), 498–507.

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations was signed in 1961[9] and outlined the tasks for diplomatic missions. First, they need to act as a representative of the sending state in more than a social or ceremonial role. Second, they need to protect host state interests and the property and ownership of firms in the host country. Third, diplomats should negotiate and sign treaties. Fourth, they need to gather information on the state of affairs and developments through all legal means, and report home. Finally, they need to promote relations and deepen economic, commercial, cultural and scientific relations. Ambassadors normally devote the largest amount of their work to assisting private enterprises in local commercial disputes. Diaspora communities are not able to accomplish each of these tasks as they have no possibility of bargaining or signing treaties, but they can help fulfill the diplomatic tasks in the other areas. This is referred to as track-one diplomacy.

In contrast to track-one diplomacy, all citizen-to-citizen diplomacy, as opposed to official government-to-government diplomacy, is known as track-two diplomacy. One of the most famous types of track-two diplomacy occurred during the Cold War where Soviet citizens and United States citizens would get together to accomplish tasks. Project RAFT (Russians and Americans for Teamwork) was created by river runners to cooperate in rafting the Chuya River in the Soviet Union, and the Colorado River in the United States. The whole idea was that by individuals getting to know each other through cooperating in running rivers, that it would be difficult to remain enemies and that governments would then follow and peace would be achievable. Thus, peace would be possible through sport.[10]

While track-one diplomacy and track-two diplomacy are opposites, it is possible to combine the two tracks. Known

9 Johnson, D. H. N. (1961). Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, *10*(3), 600–615.

10 World Rafting Championship History - International Rafting Federation (https://www.international rafting.com/racing/wrchistory)

as track one and a half diplomacy, governments work with private citizens to achieve diplomacy.[11] Diasporas can work in either track one and a half diplomacy as well as track-two diplomacy. Diplomacy does not simply mean engagement, but strategic communication to promote and protect national interests.[12] While social and market interactions all work to promote understanding, build relationships and mitigate disagreements, this contact does not constitute diplomacy. Diplomacy refers to communication that impacts the national interest and this applies to both the host and the sending nation. A diaspora community can work to enhance communication, understanding and knowledge between states and work to build bridges where people were previously divided, thereby becoming an important diplomatic actor.

One important distinction is that diplomatic advantages from diaspora communities are much greater than any benefits that originate from tourists. There is a great difference between visiting and living in a foreign country. Short-term visitors normally travel to scenic, cultural, or historical areas for enjoyment, but rarely does this interaction generate long-term relationships. On the other hand, living and working abroad requires the resident to live and shop in their community, and this generates many opportunities to establish long-term friendships. A resident has to receive and maintain permission from the local government to live and work there. It is only possible to keep residency when the immigrant contributes to and benefits the host country. An effective diaspora community offers a unique service that directly profits and serves its new community. In establishing

11 Mapendere, J. (2005). Track One and a Half Diplomacy and the Complementarity of Tracks, Culture of Peace Online Journal, 2: 1, 66–81.

12 Davis, G. Doug & Michael O. Slobodchikoff (2024) *American Global Leadership: Ailing U.S. Diplomacy and Solutions for the Twenty-First Century.* University of Tennessee Press.
Grossman, Marc. 2024. "*US Foreign Policy, or a Policy of the Elites?*" edited by Davis & Slobodchikoff in *American Diplomacy Since the Cold War: Essays for Fixing U.S. Foreign Policy.* University of Tennessee Press.

these ties, members of the diaspora need to integrate and build bridges with the local population and build networks that include personal, social, and economic relations that advance their home country's national interest as well as the country in which the diaspora lives.

Economic Diplomacy

Modern statesmanship is much broader than acknowledging formal relations, and diaspora communities play a significant role in generating and maintaining dialogue. The networks that develop between receiving and sending countries provide informal avenues for mutual understanding and shared experiences to build bridges between diverse peoples and cultures. In addition to official relationships, links produce broad interactions that allow misunderstandings—caused by linguistic or cultural differences—to be overcome. When diplomacy works, new partnerships develop and there are avenues to de-escalate tensions and misunderstandings. These connections have commercial benefits that are realised by both the home and receiving country.

When a firm undertakes international operations, it brings greater risks than domestic investment because there are legal, linguistic, social, cultural and political differences. When investment is more unpredictable, firms only take this risk if they can earn higher returns. Firms must assess their likely costs and benefits before investing, and if the potential profits are not high enough to compensate for potential losses, they do not undertake the investment. Historically, this is a vital diplomatic task, and states with more effective foreign service representatives see more economic rewards. Diaspora communities live and work within the host country, and can share their experiences through personal networks that can mitigate the risk. Small communities living abroad provide a great window into the local culture and society that helps firms properly account for risks and provide more realistic expectations for future sales. States and large enterprises rely not only on their diplomats, but on their expatriates to provide

insights that allow them to properly assess the relative costs and benefits. The better the information, the more accurate the models and the smaller returns would be required to justify the investment. The diaspora community's shared knowledge increases the aggregate capital inflows into the host country.

The largest obstacle to international trade and investment is gaining sufficient knowledge to overcome the increased risk associated with global transactions. Firms can generate additional revenue by expanding their production or trade into foreign markets. Diaspora communities provide knowledge to firms that in earlier historic eras was a diplomatic task. One major diplomatic task is, in fact, to learn and report home in order to facilitate international trade and investment.[13] The official diplomatic capabilities, however, are limited to the individual staff in their embassy and offices. This is one area where diaspora communities directly aid the task of diplomats and provide important insights into their host country for strategic players.

Diaspora communities facilitate this expansion by sharing their familiarity and experience of the host country's legal system, society, market, cultural life and political system. Countries sending their citizens abroad that grow into small communities in foreign countries have a resource that allows them to better gauge risks associated with expansion or trade, and this facilitates market growth for firms in their home country. The benefit varies by industrial sector. Financial firms and banks do not expand internationally to gain new clients, but rather to retain their existing clients who move abroad.[14] As diaspora communities grow, financial institutions in the home country are likely to open offices to preserve their clients. When international bank expansion takes place, this opens the door for other industrial sectors to move into the

13 Davis, G. Doug 2011. "Regional Trade Agreements and Foreign Direct Investment." *Politics & Policy.* 39:3, 401-419.

14 Williams, Barry (2002) "The Defensive Expansion Approach to Multinational banking: Evidence to Date." *Financial Markets, Institutions, & Instruments.* 11:2: 127–203.

host country by allowing them to continue using their home country's financial institutions, where there is a long history.

Merchants focus on importing goods and services when there is local demand for the product. One way in which diaspora communities serve their home country is through their desire to import goods and services from their home country. These goods serve to increase the aggregate demand for the products, and local merchants wishing to capitalise on this potential profit import goods into the host country. This process works in reverse, as diaspora communities integrate into their host state and come to rely on locally produced items. When individuals return home, they continue to desire these items and more goods are traded from the host back to the home country. In this way, the diaspora communities serve both the host and home country's national interest and facilitate economic relations.

The fourth task specified in the Vienna Convention is that diplomats need to learn as much as possible about their host country—through legal means—and report this back to local authorities. This is greatly aided by diaspora communities who have many informal connections and are able to anticipate policy, social, or market changes and communicate this to actors in their home country that would be affected. When firms invest abroad they are at an initial disadvantage when it comes to being able to influence government and understand social or market changes. Diaspora communities are deeply networked within their host country and have the experience to distinguish and understand what elements may pose future risks and what will pass. Wise diplomats need to establish deep relations with their own citizens who can provide them with knowledge and warnings of changes that may affect their home country, its enterprises, or its citizens. Official diplomats need to foster these relations to be able to do their job and complete their tasks. This is especially important for businesses that need to anticipate any political or social change that could impact their overall profitability. The diaspora community, when it works well, is able to identify these risks and petition the government to prevent the negative policy

from taking effect. When this is successful, no-one will be aware because the problem was effectively countered and prevented. Diplomats rely on their diaspora communities to identify potential problems and report them while working on mitigating their negative impact.

There are important dangers a country faces when its political leader leaves and is replaced by another who is not widely understood. This is a particularly perilous time for a country's foreign policy, because the new leader will need to consolidate power and normally install a new foreign minister. In some cases, such as the United States, thousands of political appointees working in the highest offices leave their positions and are replaced. Even when the changes are smaller in magnitude, a leadership transformation generates a lot of insecurity. Will the new leader follow the same policies as their predecessor, or will they seek to revise the status quo? In these circumstances, a diaspora community works to overcome the instability in this transition by providing the incoming ambassador and staff with their network of contacts and by their willingness to preserve strong relations. When a strong diaspora community is present, this overcomes institutional weaknesses created by leadership changes (Davis & Slobodchikoff, 2024). The diplomats who arrive in the host country need to rely on the diaspora community leaders to build the most effective bridges to community, economic, and political leaders in the host country. As such, the overall diplomatic task is greatly aided by a diaspora community that provides a long-term perspective and works to preserve relations even following a leadership change.

Diaspora communities do pose one challenge to official diplomacy when it comes to sanctions. When one country engages in behaviour that the international community wishes to punish, Western states find it politically expedient to impose economic sanctions on the offending state. The idea behind this policy is to create incentives to change behaviour by levying economic penalties that produce harm by restricting access to currency, markets, or goods. Sanctions are used to change the cost and benefits to encourage the

targeted state to alter its conduct. Diaspora networks work to undermine these measures for two reasons. The community has an interest in maintaining trade and keeping other market exchanges open. When there are sanctions, the personal livelihood of the diaspora community is in jeopardy and they are likely to quietly find alternative means to preserve their local market. At the same time, the community has the means through connections and a network to bypass the restrictions and provide access to the limited products through alternative means. This makes it possible for the sanctioned country to continue participating in the global economy. In this case, even when a state is engaging in negative policy, it is an advantage to host diaspora communities because their informal networks and personal incentives allow them to overcome sanctions.

Diaspora Communities De-escalate Conflict

When large diaspora communities are present, they work to build bridges that can work to overcome and mitigate disputes between their home and host countries. When diaspora communities function well, the home country needs to devote more attention to the country hosting their citizens. The country sending the workers abroad benefits through the financial remittances that are provided to their families—it provides social welfare to a significant population who is often dependent on these transfers. The enhanced market interdependence leads to economic expansion that works to build incentives for the home country to deepen and maintain their relations with the host state. The political calculus changes and there is a need to mitigate disputes and adjust early while they are small. Their diplomatic staff and mission will change its focus to support and strengthen relations with the host.

A large diaspora requires a larger, more active diplomatic staff to provide services to their nationals and learn as early as possible of any changes in the host country that could impact their citizens. The additional diplomats can help their nationals who get into legal trouble or have other emergencies.

The other critical task is that the diaspora community learns of problematic social, market, or political changes that could negatively impact their community. The advantage is that large diaspora communities will be integrated into the society and be attentive to the legal, economic, and institutional environment. When these areas change, the diaspora community can share this with their diplomatic staff so that they get addressed to minimise any negative consequences. Diaspora communities provide a great advantage to states in that they can observe and identify potential problems while they are small and address them at the micro level before they constitute significant challenges. When this is working it is difficult to perceive from the outside, but maintaining strong relations requires an active diplomacy and for the sending state to prioritise these relations.

The diaspora community will also establish financial, investment, and trade bridges between the two countries and this will play a significant role in mitigating conflict. These communities deepen the economic relationship and generate trade and investment. Firms in the host and home countries will pressure their leaders to preserve good relations so that the commerce can continue. Large private enterprises will have more leverage over governmental policy than individuals, and the commercial transactions between the host and home country will work to deepen the incentives to maintain strong, stable diplomatic relations.

States hosting the diaspora community benefit through the contribution made by the diaspora community. The economic bridges increase revenue to local companies and also provide additional export markets. The longer the diaspora community remains active within the host, the greater the costs of losing it. The host also benefits by having informal networks that provide it with important information about the home state. These networks operate on both sides to increase knowledge and allows communities of different cultures to overcome divisions. It fosters understanding and weakens nationalism.

The home and host state's diplomatic prowess will increase due to the diaspora community. The enhanced social, political and economic connections increase the incentives for broader strategic coordination. Home countries that wish to maintain goodwill with the host country government will support their initiatives and needs in international institutions, such as the UN. The diaspora community works to minimise conflict and increases the partnerships so that one has more friends in the international arena. It is also more likely that this cooperation can lead to additional trade and investment treaties. The diaspora community will work to advance these relations, and one result is that the two countries will have greater international standing as they support each other in global institutions.

The world is filled with division caused by misunderstanding and fear. The diaspora community works to overcome this as individuals share their experience and knowledge with their peers and family members. Social media has connected the world and positive events are more likely to be known broadly. The diaspora community can share its experience and increase the understanding and knowledge of the host country—leading to more support for its community. The host country is also likely to see increased tourism from visiting family members and friends, but the social media posts may also attract additional tourists who become attracted through this exposure.

Large diaspora communities benefit both the sending and host countries through their social, political and economic connections. This partnership is built through thousands of micro-components that manifest themselves in the national relations between these states and this facilitates cooperation in the most important international institutions. When individuals move to work in another country and they are followed by thousands of their peers, the benefits change incentives to deepen cooperation and enhance relationships.

Diaspora communities can play a vital role in diplomacy. They not only aid in economic cooperation which leads to

positive benefits to both the host country as well as the country from which the diaspora originated, but diaspora communities also serve as a tool of conflict resolution when states cannot resolve conflict using track-one diplomacy. They allow information and communication links to continue even if official government channels of communication are broken. The problem with traditional studies of diplomacy is that it is very difficult to directly measure the effect on diplomacy of diaspora communities. While it is relatively simple to observe high-level track-one diplomatic efforts, track one and a half diplomatic efforts are effective precisely because they cannot be easily seen or measured. That gives governments the ability to utilise diaspora communities to lay the groundwork for effective diplomacy both in conflict resolution and economic relations.

Ultimately, diaspora diplomacy is a fundamental, yet sorely overlooked aspect of diplomacy. Future studies of diaspora diplomacy should use focus groups and interviews to parse exact methods in which diaspora communities aid governments in mitigating conflict as well as helping to build economic cooperation between states. Because diasporas are non-governmental actors, their role in diplomacy is often viewed as being non-important. Yet, in reality, diaspora communities are vital links between governments in both economics and conflict resolution. They provide a layer of knowledge and willingness to help governments achieve strategic objectives. While skeptics might argue that their loyalty lies solely with either their country of origin or their host country, the reality is much more complicated. Diaspora communities want to achieve many of the same goals that other individuals want to achieve. They want to create a good and secure life with opportunities for advancement and social mobility. The reason that they emigrated in the first place was often to pursue those opportunities because their country of origin was not able to provide a secure life for them. Thus, it is in the interest of the diaspora communities to help to achieve good relations between their host country and their country of origin. As many members of the diaspora communities still

have family members living in their country of origin, the strengthening of economic ties between the host country and the country of origin directly benefit members of the diaspora communities. Similarly, by aiding in conflict resolution, diaspora communities directly benefit as they are looked upon as aiding peace instead of as enemies. Diaspora communities often suffer if conflict breaks out between their host country and their country of origin.

Diaspora Diplomacy in the MENA region

The MENA region is well-placed to benefit from the diaspora communities employed within the region. The region's energy reserves provide large resources with which to employ foreign workers, and this has attracted many foreigners who can contribute to the host country. The Middle East hosts different types of migrants, some of them being displaced refugees who have escaped a natural disaster or conflict. The non-displaced migrants bring labour and intellectual skills as they come to work or study. The professional foreign workers often bring family members who are also educated and can contribute to the community's cultural and social life, even if they do not work. The non-displaced refugees provide more immediate benefits to both the host country and their home by facilitating the communication that facilitates deeper integration. Migrants escaping disaster or conflict can also serve to bring together and build bridges between countries, but this is not immediate because their first priority is survival, not integration. Since they had to flee their home country, the widespread scattering of their neighborhood to escape a crisis means that there is often no way for them to share their knowledge with the community back home. The primary diplomatic benefit within the Middle East comes from professional, non-displaced migrants.

Not all MENA states are equally endowed to receive migrants, but those possessing the most international energy reserves are able to provide high incomes and reliable positions for educated workers who wish to migrate to those

states. The resource endowments are greater in the Middle East than North Africa, and they host most of the non-displaced migrants.

The migrant population in the MENA region has more than doubled in the past decades.[15] In fact, the twelve Arab Middle Eastern states hosted 24.1 million migrant workers in 2019, constituting fourteen percent of all global migrant labourers.[16] There is another regional uniqueness in the MENA that is not found anywhere else in the world: four states have more migrant workers than citizens. The UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain have more than one migrant for each citizen, and rely extensively on foreign labour for their economy and services. In addition, Saudi Arabia is another notable case as it hosts 13.5 million migrants, which is the third most globally after the United States and Germany.[17] Israel also relies on a professional migrant population, as these diasporas compose approximately twenty-two percent of its population. Professional migrants are of vital importance to the MENA region, and can help to provide a unique service to both the new host country as well as to their country of origin by helping to aid in diplomacy.

Conclusion

Diaspora communities can be a useful tool for states in managing conflict. States need to understand how to properly maintain relations with a diaspora community, and policymakers need to be intentional in building bridges. One of the ways to utilise the diaspora community is to develop

15 Connor, Philip. 2016. "Middle East's Migrant Population More Than Doubles Since 2005." Pew Research Center, October.

16 The data comes from the International Labor Organization (https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm) and includes data for Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

17 Data from Statistica

ties with leaders within the diaspora communities. There are multiple ways to achieve this, but one place to start is to attend cultural festivals, being open to the cultures represented by different diaspora communities, and being open to meeting with members of the diaspora community. These small steps can go a long way to integrating the diaspora community so that they do not feel or experience isolation. The key is not to push or force integration at the cost of a diaspora's traditional culture, but rather to appreciate the culture while looking to generate true cultural exchange and understanding.

Open communication with leaders of different diaspora communities is of paramount importance. If diaspora communities are to be used effectively in international diplomacy, then diplomacy must exist between the diaspora communities and their host countries. These informal lines of communication are not easy to establish; governments must make efforts to build bridges and create opportunities to improve mutual understanding. If efforts are not made, the diaspora community may cause domestic turmoil and build frustration rather than bonds. It is important to avoid alienating members from the home community who are well-connected with their home country.

Examining diaspora diplomacy is a new area of research. It is important to assess how governments interact with diaspora communities and to learn from the past so that the diaspora community works to benefit both the host and home country.

Chapter 6

Diaspora Bonds in the MENA Region: A Financial Insight

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Abstract

A diaspora bond is a type of financial vehicle issued by a country to tap into the financial resources of its citizens living abroad, known as a diaspora. Patriotism is the principal motivation for the diaspora bond issue. These bonds are intended to encourage members of the diaspora to invest in their countries' development projects, infrastructure, or other economic initiatives. This helps the country raise capital and develop while fostering a connection between the diaspora and their country of origin. Today, it is possible for immigrants to remain connected with their native countries and give back to their motherland. The emigration of skilled people is a loss for a country, but, on the other hand, skilled migration is an opportunity to receive remittances, trade, investment projects and new knowledge for a country. Some countries in the MENA region are pursuing government policies to develop links with their overseas citizens and encourage them to return or to use their knowledge and financial support for the development of their country.

Keywords: Diaspora, migration, connection, development

Diaspora Bonds in the MENA Region

A budget deficit is a basic challenge that many developing countries face. Developing countries are not successful

in collecting sufficient tax revenue due to weak economic policies, capital deficit, tax avoidance and many other economic reasons. In this situation, governments of developing countries utilise foreign borrowing as the main vehicle for financing their budget deficit. Developing countries do not have easy access to international debt markets, whereas developing countries have access to foreign financial assistance that grants loans from multi- or bilateral donors or foreign governments. This assistance includes strict conditions that governments of developing countries cannot meet.

However, in times of economic and financial crises, and also in the long run, it is not judicious for developing countries to completely depend on external financing. The difficulties with borrowing from international capital markets and the unfavorable effects of remittances have therefore motivated governments to develop an alternative external borrowing instrument called the diaspora bond.

Diaspora bonds are debt securities issued by governments or government agencies and are explicitly target to their diaspora. Diasporas are given the option to invest part of their wealth in their homeland in the form of diaspora bonds. As the issuing country may not be able or willing to pay interest appropriate to its credit rating and market perception, it relies on some kind of patriotic discount offered by the buying diasporas. The idea is that by offering diaspora bonds instead of asking for donations, the countries can leverage the diaspora's charitable intention.

The Middle East and North Africa is a geographic region whose countries are often collectively referred to by the acronym MENA. The region shares a number of cultural, economic and environmental similarities across its component countries. Diaspora members, in particular the professional and skilled individuals, are an important human capital asset for their home countries and the MENA region as a whole. The MENA diaspora can be an important catalyst and partner for governments and development institutions to foster regional integration and regional co-operation in MENA region.

According to official United Nations data, approximately 20 million MENA citizens live abroad, representing 5 percent population of the region. A new sociopolitical situation is now emerging in many MENA Countries, with some countries transitioning from dictatorship to democracies, and space opening up for more involvement and investment by the diaspora.

In recent times of crisis in the debt markets, many countries have faced difficulties in obtaining private financing using traditional financial instruments. Official aid or government financing alone will not be adequate to bridge near or long-term financing deficiencies. Ultimately, it will be necessary to adopt innovative financing approaches to fulfill targets from previously untapped investors. Diaspora bonds are one such mechanism that can enable developing countries to borrow from their diaspora communities. MENA diaspora bonds are a very significant example in this context.

MENA countries are still developing and require substantial funds to accelerate growth. The diaspora, through diaspora bonds, can lend a helping hand and play their role in economic development of this region. The logic of a diaspora bond is simple. Usually, they are tied to a specific purpose and targeted exclusively at nationals of a country residing abroad. The main reason is that home bias would encourage citizens to view these bonds as a special opportunity to contribute their funds to the development of their home countries. A recent example is the Greek debt crisis which compelled the Greek authorities to issue diaspora bonds, relying on the fact that the ideal group of external creditors would be Greeks living abroad. That being said, patriotism is not the sole motivation. Diaspora bonds can be very attractive for those seeking high return investments. Rather than deposit money with relatives at home who sometimes make rather liberal use of them, these bonds serve as an opportunity for local investment. Meanwhile, the diaspora is usually protected from the harsh economic environment at home.

For the country issuing these bonds, one appeal is the patriotic discount. Diasporas are often more than willing to purchase their home government's debt, making debt raising cheaper. It also offers a more stable source of foreign exchange in African countries, as diaspora funds are consistent across business cycles, unlike Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) on portfolio flows. Nigeria appears to be the latest African country to propose a diaspora bond sale. The Ministry of Finance recently suggested that a $300 million diaspora bond offering will follow the freshly completed, and heavily over-subscribed, $1billion Euro bond sale. However, when the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation issued a diaspora bond, the outcome was disappointing. This is because identifying and marketing viable projects is necessary in a country with such a large infrastructure gap. The most successful diaspora bond that can be found in Africa is Israel's. Israel's case is remarkable. They have been selling development-linked diaspora bonds since 1951 and in doing so, have established a strong economic and social connection between the nation and its diaspora. For diaspora bonds to work, the economics must be the main factor. But, as shown by Israel, the relationship between a county and its citizens must also be close.

North African countries must come to understand the peculiar demographics of their diaspora and their attitude towards home countries. Some will find a large class of citizens in political or economic exile who are unwilling to engage with the government. Others will find a sizeable base of second-generation diaspora members keen to partake in the economy of their home nation in whichever way possible. Highly skilled migrants in wealthier host countries are likely to be the principal purchasers of diaspora bonds. For diaspora investors to purchase hard currency bonds issued by their countries of origin, there has to be a minimum level of governance. Absence of governance, as reflected in civil disputes, is clearly a negative factor for diaspora bonds. Sometimes, a lack of governance would not disqualify most countries in the East, and many Eastern European countries, like Cuba, Haiti, and several Southern African countries which have large diasporas

abroad, but low levels of governance. Israeli and Indian experience also shows that countries will have to register their diaspora bonds with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) if they want to tap into the US retail market.

The MENA region independently and collectively lacks finance for development. The truth is that it is unlikely that Western powers would finance Africa's development in the same way that the United States financed Western European's post Second World War reconstruction through the Marshall Plan, or the US's post Second World War financing of East Asia's reconstruction as part of its strategic objective to secure these countries against communist influence. The collective savings of African citizens in countries on the continent are wholly inadequate to finance development. Africa exhibits the world's lowest rate of personal savings. Internationally, diaspora bonds tend to be long-dated securities which a country redeems on maturity. Such bonds are a source of foreign finance which are long-term and relatively stable in nature. The income from such bonds has considerable potential to finance development.

The Case of Israeli Bonds

Israel has been at the forefront of exemplifying the ways in which diaspora bonds can be used as a successful instrument in the development of finances. At their inception in 1951, diaspora bonds were issued and administered by the Development Corporation for Israel (DCI) as the authority established by the Israeli government. Although the bond was targeted at the Israeli diaspora, it was not limited as the DCl was registered with the US SEC. The bonds could be exchanged as listed securities and were subject to the US federal laws and regulations that govern the financial markets. The availability of Israel's diaspora bonds was consistent, while providing different investment avenues depending on market requirements as dictated at the time.

DCI bonds worth more than $32 billion have been raised for development in Israel, particularly for infrastructure

development in the transport, energy, water and telecommunication sectors. The bonds issued by the DCI were fixed, along with floating rate bonds and notes, with maturity periods ranging from 1 to 20 years, with bullet repayment options. These bonds presented a large patriotic discount, and other financial incentives included Israel making its interest rate slightly higher than US treasury bills.

To make the bonds more accessible, the DCI established retail agencies in the US (considering that 6 million of the 7.5 million Jews representing the Jewish diaspora live there) and in other countries. The Israeli government extended the range of the bond by granting any member of the Jewish diaspora the right to Israeli citizenship, provided that the members demonstrated commitment to defending and rescuing Jewish people residing in oppressive countries. The Jewish diaspora has a distinctive connection to Israel in that there is an irrevocable sense of shared being and belonging in Israel's economics and politics, stemming primarily from a shared religious belief that reinforces patriotism.

Islamic Bonds

A number of Middle Eastern Countries have recently issued Islamic bonds for people of the Islamic faith, rather than for a country-specific diaspora. Such bonds are typically structured as asset-backed securities, with medium term maturity. Investors share the proceeds. Islamic law, Sharia law, prohibits receiving or paying of interest. The Islamic bond market is comprised of corporate, Sukuk, sovereign and quasi-sovereign markets. Markets for Islamic bonds were severely affected by the global financial crisis of 2007 to 2009. These bonds have, however, rebounded and have recently been thriving again. The Indonesian government, for example, has issued $13 billion in Islamic bonds over the past years. The government issued its first Sukuk (Islamic bond) in 2008 to help reduce its budget deficit. Almost 80% of Indonesia's population is Muslim. In April 2012, Saudi Arabia overtook the UAE to become the largest Sukuk issuer in the Gulf region, raising $6.4

billion in the first quarter of 2012. Overall, Malaysia accounts for 71 per cent of total bonds issued and was among the top six Sukuk issuers, with $31 billion. Malaysia was followed by Saudi Arabia ($6.4 billion, 15 percent of the total) and Indonesia ($3.4 billion). Sukuk bonds issued in the first quarter of 2012 reached a record $43 billion worldwide.

Other Examples of the MENA Diaspora Providing Finance

Other instances of MENA diaspora bonds channeling funds into a home country exist, primarily through remittances. In 1991, Lebanon initiated a treasury account aimed at reducing Lebanese debt. Through this account and treasury bonds that were made available, the Lebanese diaspora contributed about $35 million to assist their home economy. Lebanon has an estimated 4–15 million diaspora members worldwide, and it also receives high levels of remittances. Of overall household income, remittances represent 22 percent and savings accounts contribute 8.8 percent. The Lebanese diaspora has enabled the acquisition of homeland bonds. After the 1991 issue of bonds, however, additional funds could have been raised but subsequent government regimes prolonged and retained the diaspora bonds.

The World Bank has come up with a novel plan to help rebuild "Arab Spring" economies—people power. In a move to raise funds to reconstruct nations hit by unrest, the bank is recommending that bonds be issued and financed by nationals of those countries who work abroad. "So-called diaspora bonds could help to generate more than US$ 1 billion in each African Nation, including those affected by unrest", said Dilip Ratha, a World Bank economist. "The diaspora can be a friend in foul weather. If things are not going well in your country and foreign investors aren't there, the diaspora will still be there," said Mr. Ratha, the manager of the migration and remittance development prospect group at the World Bank.

Libya is the only country to have suffered major damage to its infrastructure through armed conflict. But other countries' abilities to fund civil projects have been hobbled by dwindling public funds and high financing costs. The World Bank believes diaspora bonds could help to meet some of the funding needs in the years ahead.

Egyptians working abroad send home about $7.7 billion every year, more than the country receives in receipts from the Suez Canal. The amount of money sent home by Moroccans is about $6.7 billion, which exceeds the value of receipts from Morocco's tourism industry. The World Bank estimates that foreign workers hold similar amounts in bank accounts in the countries in which they work. Much of the cash is in deposits, offering a yield of only about 1%, according to Mr. Ratha. Apart from raising cash for infrastructure projects and boosting the finances of migrants, diaspora bonds would serve other purposes. After popular revolutions in 2011 toppled the rulers of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, many nationals were keen to help in rebuilding their countries' battered economies. Selling bonds linked to a specific infrastructure project such as a school or hospital would tap into the desire of many people to make an emotional investment in the future of their countries, according to Ratha.

In addition, diaspora bonds could help with the development of capital markets and provide a long-term source of financing to governments. The World Bank is keen to offer technical expertise on the pricing and structure of diaspora bonds as well as acting as a broker between the governments issuing the bonds and their nationals working abroad. Selling bonds linked to projects ring-fenced from political uncertainty would encourage investment in so-called "Arab Spring" economics in times of instability, according to Mr. Ratha. Diaspora bonds have helped countries as diverse as India and Israel to raise money. The World Bank has also advised the governments of Kenya and the Philippines on issuing diaspora bonds.

Drawbacks of Diaspora Bonds

Diasporas from the MENA region can be critical to foster regional integration, entrepreneurship and economic growth, and can help countries in the region become majors players in the global economy, says the new World Bank Group. "There are more than 20 million people from the Middle East and North Africa living abroad, but we fail to think of them beyond remittances", said Hafez Ghanem, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa. "This diaspora is a potential goldmine of knowledge, skills and business networks which, given the right circumstances, could be tapped to address some of the region's current challenges, such as lacklustre investment and high youth unemployment." Using data gathered from an online survey and interviews of about 1000 MENA diaspora members worldwide, there was an almost unanimous consensus amongst the participants that if their respective governments treated them as partners rather than a source of remittance, their engagement with their home country would significantly increase. Diasporas remain more willing than foreign investors to invest in their home country during turbulent times, as they have more awareness of the business environment and local practice. "Through these surveys, we understand better that if capitalised upon effectively, the MENA diaspora can be an indispensable vehicle to enhance trade, boost countries' competitiveness and foster knowledge transfer", said Anabel Gonzalez, senior director of the World Bank Group's Trade and Competitiveness Global Practice.

Potential Challenges of an African Diaspora

Unlike Israel and India, Africa does not have a shared identity. The measure of shared identity among African is arguably an affinity in being mutually victim to slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Africans are arguably united in their wanting to overcome the continued residue of underdevelopment left by the triple oppression of African people. Poor governance,

a lack of democracy and appalling cases of mismanagement by African governments render investors cautious when purchasing diaspora bonds. Globally, investors are skeptical of Africa's long-term stability and future security.

How Bonds Aimed at the Diaspora Raise Funds for Africa

If structured the right way and linked to clear goals, diaspora bonds have huge potential to raise much-needed development finances. As many African countries attempt to raise development finance, diaspora bonds, which resemble other kinds of bonds but are targeted at citizens abroad, are highly appealing. The African diaspora is massive and has significant accumulated wealth. Moreover, diaspora investors are typically motivated by more than simply maximising returns. They often also want to help improve the socio-economic conditions in their home counties, making them willing to accept below-market returns, a phenomenon known as the "patriotic discount".

It is for some of these reasons that the likes of India and Israel have used diaspora bonds to raise money in the past, as well as in the present. However, their use in Africa, including in fragile and conflict affected states, is more recent and less certain. The experience of Ethiopia is a case in point. Ethiopia's first diaspora bond was issued in 2008, but sales fell well short of expectations. A second release in 2011 also appears to be struggling, raising only a small portion of the investment required to fund the Grand Renaissance Dam project.

Reasons for Success of Diaspora Bonds

A wide variety of factors determine the success of a diaspora bond, but a report by Oxford Economic Forecasting points out that these features fall largely into two categories. The first is the offering's structure. Diaspora bonds need to be structured in a way that makes them appealing and accessible

to a wide range of diaspora members. For example, a range of investment options, particularly in ensuring low minimum purchase requirements, can help attract individual, small-scale investors. Meanwhile, ensuring bond denomination in stable and convertible currencies such as Euros, British pounds or US dollars can overcome investors' concerns over currency stability. While time-consuming and expensive, proper registration of the bonds in investors' countries of residence can also be critical to ensure investor's confidence and avoid regular penalties.

The second set of factors that determine the success of diaspora bonds is the offering's link to development. Investors expect their investments to have a positive impact in the issuing country, and bonds marked for specific projects such as infrastructure, education or healthcare, can be particularly appealing to the diaspora market. Commutating the progress of the development connected to the bond can help attract investors for subsequent offerings. In some instances, bonds focused on sub-national projects may be especially effective in this regard. Many members of the diaspora would have left their countries of origin due to conflict or repression, and may distrust the national government.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the rationale and potential for issuing diaspora bonds as instruments for raising external development finance, mostly drawing on the experiences of Israel and India. The analysis presented indicates the need for MENA citizens living abroad to foster trade, investments, and technology transfer in the MENA region, though it is not necessary for the diaspora to come back home.

Findings

1. The MENA diaspora is mainly motivated and committed to support the economic development of their motherland. Diaspora members are more connected to their nations

of origin, where families and friends reside, than to their countries of residence.
2. The MENA governments generally do not formally recognise the contribution of their citizens living abroad, except for remittances. Nevertheless, the diaspora can attract foreign investment, promote trade, and facilitate technology and knowledge transfer.
3. The preferred forms of intervention of the MENA diaspora are knowledge transfer, mentoring and capacity building. A number of diaspora members have invested at home, or have tried to, and believe that their priority should be to help young professionals become more organised, to improve their products and services, and to help them access markets.

Recommendations

To date, however, the actual issuance of diaspora bonds remains weak. A number of factors contribute to this outcome. First, there is limited awareness about this financing vehicle. Governments and other entities are often discouraged by the complexities of this bond instrument. Lacking capacity to undertake bond issuance, they take the easy way out of depending upon national banks to receive local and foreign currency deposits (LCDs and FCDs) from diaspora investors. While FCDs attract foreign currency inflows, these can be withdrawn at any time. This is for any demand and saving deposits. However, even term deposits can be withdrawn at any time by forgoing a portion of accrued interest. Therefore, FCDs are likely to be much more volatile, requiring banks to hold much larger reserves against their FCD liabilities, thereby reducing their ability to fund investments. In contrast, all bonds, including those targeted at the diaspora, are long-term in nature. Hence, the proceeds from such bonds can be used to finance investments with greater predictability. In view of this, many developing country policymakers would certainly benefit from technical assistance aimed at improving their understanding of structuring bond offerings, registering

them with regulatory agencies, such as the US SEC, and assessing whether or not such instruments need to be rated by rating agencies.

Second, many countries still have little concrete appreciation of the capabilities and resources of their respective diasporas. A recent World Bank survey by Plaza (2009) pointed out that very few governments have a complete mapping of their diaspora. Data on diasporas are mainly based on those who register with embassies. Furthermore, there is little coordination at the embassy level when dealing with diasporas. As a result, many governments do not know where their diasporas are located. They also have little knowledge of how much their diasporas earn, save and invest. However, this is now beginning to change. With remittances becoming an increasingly important source of development for finance, countries are now becoming more and more interested in tracking their diasporas for their own interest. Countries are also moving towards granting their diasporas duel citizenship.

A third constraint on diaspora bond issuance comes from the failure of many potential issuers to plan ahead. Indeed, many potential issuers resort to whatever instruments are at hand at the last minute. Furthermore, many also abandon their plans for using new financing mechanisms as soon as the financing gap goes away. This seems to have happened in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, for example.

Diaspora investors must have confidence in the government of their home country if they are to purchase bonds issued by their countries of origin. Countries with a hostile diaspora are unlikely to succeed in raising financing through diaspora bonds. Countries with political insecurity and weak institutional capacity would find it hard to market diaspora bonds unless credit enhancements are provided by more creditworthy institutions. Although patriotism motivates diaspora members to provide funding at discounted rates, they must have confidence that the funds will be used productively. Such confidence can be generated by creating

appropriate structures for the productive use of the income from diaspora bonds.

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Chapter 7

Construction of Migrant Identity in the MENA Region: A Case Study of the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Migration to the Arabian Peninsula has been ongoing for at least the past two centuries; much earlier than the establishment of the nation state of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971. There are records of traders and sailors coming in boats of various sizes from coastal towns and villages in present-day Iran and the Indian sub-continent. The Arabian Peninsula, once called the Trucial Coast, was known for its thriving pearl trade, and merchants came to seek these in exchange for goods that were crucial for survival in the largely desert environment. With the discovery of oil, there was an acceleration in migrant inflows. Thus, many migrants chose to settle permanently in the Gulf region, seeking employment and a livelihood, and often fleeing from conflict, persecution, or poverty. This inward migrant flow has resulted in a lively and mutual exchange of cultures which can be seen in several cultural expressions. Migrant responses to the processes of acculturation range from adaptation to language, customs, social practices and family composition. This process of second culture acquisition unfolds over many years and may follow one of four models of adaptation. This study focuses on the construction of migrant identity in the United Arab Emirates. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with eight primarily second-generation individuals whose families have settled in the UAE for more than

30 years, this qualitative study aims to investigate patterns of second culture acquisition. Participants were drawn from several different countries of origin, including Afghanistan, India, Iran, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, Palestine and Yemen. Results were analysed against Berry's Acculturation Model and LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton's Six Dimension's Bicultural Competencies Framework.

Key words: migration, UAE, migrant flows, culture, acculturation, second culture acquisition, biculturalism, Berry's acculturation model, LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton's bicultural competencies framework

Introduction

A chance encounter with a student at the campus of Abu Dhabi University in Al Ain triggered the interest of Kanji, one of the two authors of this study. The student, a young undergraduate, closely resembled another student that Kanji had in her class. During the conversation between Kanji and the student, the former discovered that the latter was indeed the sister of a student in Kanji's class, and both sisters were of Pakistani origin. Kanji had mistakenly assumed that the sister who was in her class was a local Emirati student, a deduction based on the traditional dress (*abayah* and *shayla*—the traditional long black dress and head covering) worn by the student, and the fact that the student spoke the Emirati dialect of Arabic flawlessly and conversed only with other Emirati students in the class.

Curious about this phenomenon, Kanji began paying additional attention to the cultural background of the students, specifically their ease of speaking in Emirati Arabic, paying close attention to their names and their peer groups, and found that the incident of the two sisters was by no means an isolated occurrence. This led her to become more aware of the fact that many of her students straddled at least two cultures. Thus began a delightful journey of discovery leading to a keen interest in second-culture acquisition.

Permanent or temporary voluntary migration is a common practice in our globalised world, with individuals and families migrating for work, study, or permanent settlement, as a result of which they are exposed to different cultures. While many people adapt and settle well in their adopted countries, some remain mal-adapted, and a large body of research on cross-cultural adaptation has emerged. However, very little research has been conducted on the experiences of the expatriate populations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is a relatively small petroleum-rich nation and is one of the countries within the bloc of nations known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). With its large populations of well-settled expatriate communities, the UAE offers a fascinating case study for understanding contemporary patterns of cultural integration, assimilation and second-culture acquisition.

This exploratory study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the patterns of second-culture acquisition and the construction of migrant identity among second-generation individuals in the UAE. Eight participants, comprising 6 females and 2 males aged between 23 and 29 years, participated in this study. All but one of them belonged to the second generation, with their families having settled in the UAE for a range of 30 to 60 years. Participants were drawn from diverse countries of origin, including Afghanistan, India, Iran, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, Palestine and Yemen. The primary data collection method used in this research was semi-structured interviews. among second-generation individuals.

The table below summarises key demographic information about the participants involved in this study:

Criterion	**Details**
Gender	6 females 2 males
Age	23 years old–29 years old

Criterion	Details
Country of origin	Afghanistan (female) India (female) Iran (female) Morocco (female) Syria (male) Pakistan (female) Palestine (male) Yemen (male)
Length of stay in UAE	All born in UAE, with exception of female from Morocco who migrated to the UAE following her marriage to an Emirati male in 2017.

Second-culture acquisition is a complex process, and several theories and frameworks can be found in the literature to describe how individuals negotiate the process of settling into a new cultural environment. For the purposes of this study, we utilised John Berry's Model of Acculturation (2001) which posits that individuals use one of four acculturation strategies to adjust to their new environments: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. Additionally, we have drawn on the six dimensions of Bicultural Competencies suggested by LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (2013) to assess competencies which support the acculturation strategies. These include: (i) knowledge of cultural belief and values; (ii) a positive attitude towards both groups; (iii) bicultural efficacy; (iv) communication ability; (v) role repertoire; and (vi) groundedness. While second-culture acquisition and biculturalism appear to be similar, there are some nuanced differences between the two. Biculturalism focuses on the psychological and identity aspects of individuals as they navigate between two cultures. On the other hand, second-culture acquisition emphasises how individuals learn the process of adapting to a new culture and how they acquire the competencies in a second culture. Bearing this distinction in mind, we found these two frameworks useful in assessing the processes allowing our subjects to adapt to a second culture.

Historical Background

The Arabian Peninsula has been characterised by migration and movement throughout its entire inhabited history. Indeed, for the nomadic herders of the peninsula's interior as well as the maritime merchants of its coastal regions, movements and interconnections were intricately intertwined in the pursuit of livelihoods adapted to the region's harsh environments. When contemplating the recent history of the Arabian Peninsula and its inhabitants, migration in the region can be divided into three distinct historical periods.

Before oil was discovered in the late 1950's in Abu Dhabi and in 1966 in Dubai, the then Trucial States under British rule had attracted various flows of migrants, including merchants from the Indian subcontinent, Baluchi families, and seasonal workers and traders from neighbouring Persia, including the Ajamis, a class of merchants who settled primarily in Dubai in the mid-nineteenth century. The industrial revolution, the pearl trade, Hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, considered to be a central ritual for Muslims), and the need for trained employees in the ports all contributed to an influx of Indians to the Persian Gulf area around the turn of the nineteenth century. Common colonial-era workers included craftsmen, masons, technologists, clerks, and administrators who mostly served the needs of the British colonial administration (Kumar, 2016). The "coolie" labour system established by the British Empire during the colonial period allowed for the inflow of Indian migrants to the countries which later become the countries of the GCC (Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE). It would be useful to remember the prevailing influence of the British in some of these areas. Initially, the migrants worked in the pearling, mercantile and farming industries, and when oil was discovered in the 1950s in the UAE, they were hired by oil companies in large numbers.

In 1962, Abu Dhabi was the first emirate to initiate hydrocarbon exports. In the same year, it was estimated that half of its population consisted of expatriates. Large numbers

of foreign employees entered the UAE following the 1973 oil surge.

During the 1970s oil boom, many skilled and unskilled workers came to the GCC countries from India, primarily from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to help with infrastructure development, building projects and the growing oil industry. For several decades, the pattern was for single workers to work in the Gulf area for a few years and then to return home, with their place being taken by a new wave of migrants. Over time, the Indian expat community has expanded to become the largest non-Arab expat group in the GCC (Kumar, 2016). This population includes low-skilled, semi-skilled and professionals and business owners, with a wide range of jobs in both the public and private sectors. In the 1970s, when Arab Gulf countries needed more workers, India seemed like a logical option to source workers from because of its historical ties, close location and the availability of a large labour force.

This interdependence between labourers on the one hand and employment opportunities on the other has led to very warm economic and political ties between India and the GCC nations. However, the flow of Indian workers to GCC countries has changed over time due to changes in the price of oil and other factors.

A very diverse foreign population came to the UAE in the 2000s due to the country's unprecedented levels of economic growth. There are no demographic data on non-national residents in the UAE categorised by country of citizenship. The two countries with the biggest populations in the UAE, Bangladesh (700,000) and India (2.6 million), were nevertheless the top two national groupings, according to data received from diplomatic sources and published in the media in 2015. Emiratis would therefore rank third in terms of population, with 1.085 million people (Kumar, 2016).

Second-Culture Acquisition

Second-culture acquisition is the adjustment of an immigrant to the new, mostly dominant culture to which they must adapt. In the new culture, immigrants must navigate through situations in which they have no experience, often without a grasp of the language. Immigrants must deal with changes such as alterations in diet, climate change, different customs and social practices, unfamiliar clothing, new employment and different family composition. Moreover, they may live in the second culture as single individuals or families while most of their extended family resides in their country of origin or in another host country. Several different models have been constructed to explain the methods immigrants use to adapt to the new culture.

As far back as 1928, Park suggested the marginal human theory, suggesting that individuals who lived at the juncture of two cultures are "marginal people". To this, Stonequist (1935) added that individuals who can identify with two cultures need to manage the complexity of dual reference points, referred to as "double-consciousness" by Goldberg (1961). Goldberg (1941) and Green (1947) proposed that this can be advantageous for people living in two cultures simultaneously, especially if they are not psychologically affected by their experiences.

It is futile for us to engage in a definition of what comprises "culture", as several adequate definitions for this term already exist. Rather, we can speak to the idea of "cultural competence", which suggests that an individual who is culturally competent needs to possess certain characteristics, such as having a strong sense of personal identity, understanding the beliefs and worldview of their culture, being able to communicate well in the language of their culture, having the know-how to navigate the culture's institutions, maintaining social contact with people in the culture group, and acting according to socially-sanctioned norms. Thus, "cultural competence" is a broad term with many levels of social skills and personality development; thus,

an individual may be able to move socially in two or more cultures with ease but may find it more difficult to negotiate diverse institutional structures. Generally, however, the more levels that one is competent at, the more easily one can move within the cultures.

Several models of second-culture acquisition have emerged over time. John Berry's Model of Acculturation is generally recognised as one of the key frameworks for understanding how an individual encounters a second culture that is different from their own. If the second culture is encountered over a prolonged period and particularly during the process of settlement, especially if it has economic and social impact, the second culture becomes the dominant culture. Berry proposes two dimensions in his model: these are Cultural Maintenance vs. Cultural Contact and Identity Integration vs. Identity Segregation. Cultural Maintenance is a reference to the degree to which an individual retains his/her original culture and its values; Cultural Contact refers to how much contact an individual has with the host or dominant culture. Identity Integration is a reference to how well an individual can integrate elements of both cultures in his/her identity; while Identity Segregation is the opposite and refers to how well an individual is able to maintain two separate cultural identities.

There are four acculturation strategies that emerge from these four dimensions: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. These describe the processes by which an individual from one culture acquires the competencies to fit into a second, sometimes more dominant, culture. Each of the strategies has its own set of emphases and assumptions, and point to different outcomes. The brief description below will be useful in understanding how the participants in the current study represent some of these models.

1. *Assimilation*: the underlying assumption of this model is that the individual will completely lose their own cultural identity as they acquire a different, new identity within the dominant culture. In his work,

Gordon (1964, 1978) outlined the various stages of assimilation that an individual passes through: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identification assimilation, attitudinal receptional assimilation, behavioural receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation. The goal of the assimilation process is to become socially accepted by the dominant culture group (Ruiz, 1981) and outcomes may include acceptance or rejection by members of the dominant culture.

2. *Integration Model*: in this model, the individual seeks to maintain both cultures, preserving the original culture while engaging in social contact with the dominant culture, resulting in a blend of both cultures. Individuals who are adept at both cultures are referred to as "bicultural" or "multicultural" because they are comfortable with both cultures. Here, the two identities are not fused. The multicultural model has been studied at great length, and multiculturalism has been critiqued and defended in equal measure. However, creating pluralistic societies is one of the most urgent issues that several European and North American societies must confront today, in view of the large numbers of migrants escaping the effects of wars, poverty and climate change, and seeking to make Europe or North America their home.
3. *Separation Model*: individuals who fear losing their original culture may consciously adopt this model where they prioritise maintaining their original culture and resisting interaction with the dominant culture.
4. *Marginalisation Model*: individuals may choose to withdraw from both cultures, neither maintaining their original culture nor engaging with the dominant one. This strategy, considered to be extreme, can lead to detachment, isolation, and an identity crisis.

This model posited by Berry has been presented in a simple manner, but it is a highly instructive model about second-culture acquisition, and extremely useful for understanding the extent of second-culture acquisition by the participants in our study. However, it is important to bear in mind that these

strategies are not mutually exclusive, and an individual may utilise more than one of these strategies on a continuum. The picture is a complex one, especially if we consider that within one family unit, each family member may be experiencing something different; the literature indicates that intergroup contact, education levels, social skills competencies, time, age and life stage, gender and socioeconomic status, among other factors, play a role in determining the level of second-culture acquisition.

Findings and Analysis

This study, while small and exploratory, reveals some interesting insights about how social learning unfolds, the extent to which our subjects develop bicultural competencies and how additional factors such as age, gender, choice of schools, connections with one's home country and socio-economic backgrounds also play an important role in second-culture acquisition.

When measured against Berry's model of acculturation, we find that the male students are closer to the assimilation model, while all the females adopt a strategy that is not separation, nor integration, but something in between, and we suggest developing an additional interim strategy between these two. We surmise that the social environment plays a role in integrating subjects into the dominant culture. The integration of participants into the local community is closely linked to their absorption of the local culture and its various aspects. It has been observed that subjects who had social access to the local community from a young age were more prone to absorbing the local culture and embracing its aspects as they grew up. Our two male subjects were raised in Emirati neighborhoods where they interacted with peers, imbibing local traditions, customs and culture through frequent social interactions in schools and sports, as well as socialising with other young male Emiratis. As male students interacted with their Emirati peers, they successfully absorbed nuances of the local language, adopted local dress (a long white *kandura*

and a traditional headcovering known as a *ghutrah*), eating habits, social activities and other traditional social norms such as meeting in coffee houses. While a deeper study with more participants may yield a more convincing analysis, at this stage we can surmise, albeit tentatively, that immigrant males in the UAE tend be oriented towards Cultural Contact and Identity Integration dimensions of Berry's Acculturation Model. There also seems to be a connection with age, since prolonged cultural contacts over a long period of time (six years or longer) will extend the opportunities for social learning.

Notably, the female interviewees shared a different set of experiences. Different paths emerged among our female subjects as they integrated into Emirati culture. Across the board, all of them embraced two distinctive elements of Emirati culture: the traditional clothing (*abayah* and *shayla*) and pan-Arab cuisine. Adopting a pan-Arab cuisine is relatively easy in the UAE due to its wide availability, as well as to the fact that parts of it are like some of the cuisines of the original cultures of our subjects. Emirati food, such as *thareed*, *harees*, and other local dishes, become an integral part of the immigrants' culinary practices, further reinforcing their connection to the Emirati culture.

However, adapting to non-clothing and non-food cultural aspects was challenging. One subject faced obstacles to absorbing Arabic culture and mastering the language, leading to a separation strategy due to the language barrier. Another subject was able to balance her Iranian identity whilst adopting Emirati practices; however, further integration was hindered by her limited proficiency in Arabic, the national language of the UAE. Separation and integration were both part of her strategy. A third subject combined Emirati customs with her Indian background, learning Arabic while maintaining fluency in her native Indian language at home.

Role repertoire emerged as a key aspect of one of the subjects' acculturation strategies. As the foreign wife of an Emirati national, this individual's situation proved to be a major differentiator from the remaining subjects. As a result

of her marriage, her daily contact with her husband's family afforded her an intimate contact with Emirati culture. On the flip side, our subject was compelled to integrate to avoid being seen as an outsider, and in this regard, she admits to an excellent adjustment to Emirati ways and fitting in comfortably with their practices. Over time, she has been able to achieve a harmonious balance between her original culture and the Emirati culture, and remarks that her language skills in particular have been influenced by her interactions with people around her. In short, this subject's approach is to blend both her cultures, where she effectively adopts new customs while also maintaining some of her original culture, specifically in her attitudes towards education and openness to new experiences.

Further study with more participants promises to yield more assured conclusions; however, through our study, we propose that females demonstrate a closer affinity to the Cultural Maintenance and Cultural Separation dimensions of Berry's Acculturation Model. While they adopted some of the visible and more easily acquired practices such as food and dress, their lack of facility with the Arabic language as well as a different social environment did not allow them to adopt other nuanced social customs. Eid and wedding parties are the clearest areas where most of the subjects strongly maintain their native culture, displaying significant resistance to cultural assimilation.

To mitigate this, a common strategy emerged: preservation of their home culture. This was achieved through deliberate efforts to maintain their original culture within the home environment. This included clothing, language, practices, traditions and even food choices. While most of the female subjects are single, all of them confided that their future marriage partner will be someone from their home culture.

Thus, despite the small size of our study, we see a clear bifurcation of strategies between male and female subjects. Our data reveals that male participants exhibited a higher

inclination towards embracing the local (Emirati) culture compared to their female counterparts. This trend could be attributed to the relatively greater freedom males have in Arab societies to engage and socialise with individuals from external communities, a privilege not as readily extended to females.

When we look at the Bicultural Competencies Framework, we note that all these competencies play an important role in second culture acquisition, while two are exceptionally important. The first is knowledge of cultural belief and values. The UAE is an Arab, Muslim country and both these descriptors are rooted in the country's history and traditions. Arabic is the national language, and all residents are expected to be familiar with at least some rudimentary aspects of the language. Muslim traditions are observed very strictly and very visibly: the five-times daily obligatory prayers; observation of the fasting period during Ramadan; the midday communal prayer each Friday; gender segregation; and modest dress. All of our participants were observant Muslims themselves and most of them were Arab; both these factors play a crucial role in accepting the dominant culture. Moreover, all the participants were *Sunni* Muslim, including those from Afghanistan, India and Iran where the populations sometimes tend to embrace *Shia* Islam. This competency cannot be underestimated and indeed plays a central role in the settlement and acculturation processes.

The second competency that plays a significant role is communication ability. As we have already concluded, facility with the language is a key determinant of acculturation, and where communication abilities are strong, acculturation is more rapid and leads to acceptance in the dominant culture. Other competencies, such as positive attitudes towards both cultures, bicultural efficacy, and groundedness—the ability to develop social networks in the dominant culture—are crucial also. All participants exhibited a positive attitude towards both cultures, yet while the males seemed to show stronger bicultural efficacy and groundedness, the female subjects were less well integrated because they tended to have more friends who shared their original culture or cultures closer to

their own, which, in turn, impacted their bicultural efficacy and communication ability. The inter-relatedness of the competencies is unmistakable, with each impacting the other in a complex web.

The present study yields other important insights that go beyond the Acculturation Model and Bicultural Competencies framework. Our study shows that the first-generation settlers were motivated by better opportunities, leading fathers/grandfathers to migrate to the UAE. This migration often left mothers as home country representatives within the family. However, a significant obstacle emerged in the form of a language barrier, as not being familiar with Arabic severely hindered their ability to absorb Emirati culture. However, their children who were born in the UAE were exposed to the local dialect much earlier and had more opportunities to become fluent and practiced.

A discernible pattern also emerges concerning the influence of the education and professions of the first-generation parents. When the first-generation parents have professional roles such as doctors, accountants, or engineers, they often reside in expatriate-populated areas, sometimes predominantly among individuals of the same nationality. As a result, the second generation tends to maintain a stronger connection to their original culture and displays lesser assimilation into the local Emirati culture, unlike families engaged in non-professional occupations, such as auto mechanics, small business owners, and long-distance drivers, which encourage closer contact with the dominant culture.

Subjects' ties with their home country were explored, revealing a correlation between the frequency of visits to the home country and the strength of their cultural connection. Families who visited their home country annually exhibited greater resilience in maintaining their cultural identity compared to those with infrequent visits. The frequency of visits to their home country is noticeably influenced by the family's financial status. In two cases, the subjects could not return home because of the state of war in their home

countries, and three of the subjects also mentioned that since most of their extended family already reside in the UAE, there was no real need to visit their home countries. Two of our subjects recounted their limited visits to Yemen and Pakistan, reflecting on the challenges they faced in understanding local dialects and feeling like strangers there. Conversely, two other subjects, who consistently visited their home country, displayed robust confidence in their cultural identity and maintained strong ties with their relatives. The latters' experiences are examples of how home country visits can contribute to cultural identity preservation. In a multicultural context, this connection testifies to the continuing influence of family ties and tradition on second-generation immigrants' identities.

The mindset of the first generation significantly shapes the cultural dynamics within the household. Instances were shared where families held a strict stance against incorporating any cultural practices beyond their own. One subject's family, for instance, prohibited the use of henna and other dialects apart from Syrian at home. Similarly, a Palestinian participant recounted her family's challenge to partake in a traditional folk dance, highlighting the influence of family attitudes on cultural integration.

Thus, we may conclude that as part of second-culture acquisition, several sub-processes take place either explicitly or implicitly, including understanding and adapting to the nuances of the host culture, acquiring language proficiency, which is crucial for cultural identity formation and leading to second culture acquisition (Morosini et al., 1998; Su & Ma, 2021).

Table 1: A summary of our findings

Criterion: Gender	**Characteristics**
Males	Closer to Berry's model of assimilation, Cultural Contact and Identity Integration facilitated by: Absorption into social environment—through schools and friendship networks. Language fluency is key and is result of acceptance in a social environment. Familiarity with local culture—visible aspects (dress, food, practice of faith) and invisible aspects (attitudes towards gender segregation, gender roles, etc.) Familiarity with the religious background of the host culture—in the UAE, this is a critical aspect of local culture. Age is also an important determinant—the longer they have been exposed through the social environment, the easier it is to assimilate or integrate.
Females	Picture is much more nuanced, and most females fall between Cultural Maintenance and Cultural Separation dimensions of Berry's Acculturation Model, not embracing either category fully. This was the result of: Familiarity with local culture—visible aspects (dress, food, practice of faith) and invisible aspects (attitudes towards gender segregation, gender roles, etc.) Familiarity with the religious background of the host culture—in the UAE, this is a critical aspect of local culture. Limited language proficiency influenced how they absorbed local culture. Friendship circle was drawn primarily from native culture. Preservation of native culture in the home environment. Limited opportunities for social interaction.

The efficacy of Berry's model can be evaluated in other contexts, for example, in North America. Indeed, studies have shown that John Berry's acculturation strategies greatly influenced migrants' lives in Europe and North America (Philimore, 2010; Klok et al., 2017; Chen & Wu, 2021). Philimore (2010) applies Berry's acculturation strategies to refugees, assessing how this group can integrate into their new host cultures, and he provides evidence of the influence of these strategies on migrants' experiences. Similarly, in 2017, Klok et al. examined the sense of belonging of older Turkish and Moroccan migrants living in the Netherlands. Researchers identified clusters of national belonging through latent class analysis. These clusters were further analysed against Berry's acculturation strategies and the studies' findings highlight the relevance of Berry's acculturation strategies in shaping the experiences of those migrants, emphasising their impact on the sense of belonging and inclusion in the host country. Using Berry's acculturation model, Chen & Wu (2021) examined the acculturative strategies used by Chinese international students in Western universities. The study provides valuable insights into how international students, for example, navigate the acculturation process through an analysis of Berry's acculturation strategies. It points out how certain methods used by Chinese international students can influence their adjustment to Western academic environments. The latter viewpoint is borne out by a study conducted by Tahseen and Cheah (2012) showing that frequent exposure to, and interaction with, the host culture in higher education institutions facilitates greater integration and assimilation.

While the current study has not addressed how second-culture acquisition affects the mental wellbeing of immigrants, studies such as the one conducted by Ward & Rana-Deuba show that individuals who embraced an integrated approach to acculturation tended to do better psychologically than others. Moreover, their study revealed that assimilationists were less likely to encounter social difficulties. These findings suggest that adopting an integrated acculturation style positively influences psychological well-being, while an assimilationist

viewpoint may result in fewer social difficulties. These results underscore the significance of acculturation strategies in shaping individuals' experiences, well-being and adjustment to new cultural environments.

Farver et al.'s 2002 study, conducted among several immigrant groups in North America, shows that integration is the most psychologically adaptive method of acculturation, so that immigrants are able to both maintain their cultural identity and at the same time felt connected to their new host culture. The study concludes that immigrants who follow the strategy of integration tend to achieve better psychological adjustment. This conclusion, that immigrants who adopt the strategy of integration and assimilation are more likely to have positive psychological well-being than those who adopt separation and marginalisation strategies, is also substantiated by Li et. al. (2021).

Acquisition of the host language, as well as the level of similarity between the immigrant culture and the host culture, are key factors, and several studies bear out this connection, including the current study. Haansen et al.'s 2008 study, which explored how Russian and Iranian immigrants coped with their settlement in Germany, shows that among other factors, distance from German culture and unfamiliarity with the German language both had a negative impact on the mental wellbeing of immigrants. The link between language, and depth of acculturation and time taken to acculturate, was shown by Joshi et al. (2017) who demonstrated that when non-English speaking immigrants settled in Australia, being proficient in English was an intermediary factor between how long they have settled and their health outcomes.

Suggestions for Further Research

The UAE, as well as the entire GCC, is an under-researched region, and is ripe for further studies investigating a multitude of aspects of second-culture acquisition and biculturalism. One key aspect that the current study did not look at is the impact of immigrant culture on the UAE. The UAE has

absorbed several aspects of immigrant culture, including the ubiquitous national drink *karak shay* (heavily spiced brewed tea of Indian origin) and *paratha* (a savoury Indian flatbread); many words from Hindi and English have been absorbed into the Emirati dialect, as well as international fast food, Bollywood movies, and most recently, Korean music and drama and Japanese anime. Since cultural relationships are bilinear, one fascinating study could be the reflexive impact of bilinear exchanges, understanding how childhood friendships contribute to pluralistic attitudes. Other studies could also investigate specific groups such as non-Emirati spouses or the children of marriages between Emiratis and non-Emiratis, who, by the very nature of such unions are exposed to two cultures. Future researchers should also look at older settlers who are less inclined towards Cultural Contact and Integration, and who instead favour a Separation Strategy.

This study yields a more intimate understanding of how second-generation settlers are forging a composite, international identity, leading to a new cultural category, syncretic culture—which needs to be investigated further.

Conclusion

Embracing a diversity of cultures, the UAE is a vibrant tapestry of cultures shaped by the cultural interaction of Emirati and immigrant communities. Immigrant communities have long been a part of the UAE, which has absorbed several waves of settlement. Within this multicultural landscape, second-generation immigrants hold a distinctive position, blending their heritage culture with Emirati culture to shape their identities. Our two male subjects and one female subject who married Emiratis can be categorised under the acculturation strategy of "Integration". Their experiences indicate a strong inclination towards embracing and integrating into the local Emirati culture. While the males grew up in Emirati neighborhoods, they interacted closely with their peers, thereby absorbing local traditions, customs and culture. Their openness to the local community allowed them to comfortably

integrate Emirati elements into their lives. As a wife to a local man, the female study has intimate, daily contact with the culture which she has embraced over time. Additionally, their limited visits to their home countries emphasise their stronger connection to the UAE culture and society. This commitment to engaging with the local culture and embracing its practices aligns with the integration strategy, where they successfully blend their heritage culture with the host culture.

The remaining five subjects, all female, can be said to fall under the acculturation dimension of **"Maintenance with Integration".** While three of them pay regular visits to their home countries, preserving their native cultural ties, they also exhibit a willingness to integrate with the local Emirati culture. This integration is evident through their interactions with the host culture, participation in local activities, and even their residence in the UAE. However, through their consistent connections with their home countries, by preserving their original culture in their home environments, and by maintaining close friendship circles within their own cultures, they demonstrate consistent efforts to maintain their own cultures. This demonstration of a balanced approach is a blend of their original culture and the Emirati culture. This approach aligns with the maintenance strategy, whilst simultaneously incorporating elements of integration.

Interestingly, a new cultural identity seems to have emerged among some individuals—a category where they are neither fully Emirati nor completely akin to their parents' culture. This is an unusual blend of cultural elements that sets them apart as a distinct group within the country.

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Chapter 8

The UAE's Soft Power Strategy of Tolerance: A Peaceful Amalgamation of Multiple Diasporas

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Abstract

The strongest aspect of UAE's soft power is its culture of tolerance, as it is home to over two hundred nationalities coexisting in peace and security. From hosting the Pope in 2019, to setting up of worship spaces for other religions, the UAE has been a role model of inter-faith coexistence and cultural acceptance. From imbibing a UAE Cabinet-approved National Tolerance Programme in 2016 to proclaiming the year of 2019 as the "Year of Tolerance", the UAE has made every effort to craft values of dialogue and openness to different cultures and diasporas. The tolerant approach adopted by the UAE in various sectors, such as education, workplace, culture and media, has served as a bridge of communication between the people of multiple nations residing here, and their various cultures. The UAE's soft power strategy of anti-discrimination and anti-hate laws enables it to build trusting relationships with resilient communities of different faiths, and have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds, leading to deeper international partnerships and bilateral ties. This paper argues that while the UAE's policy of tolerance and cohesion serves as a melting pot for different nationalities and ethnicities, it also strengthens the UAE's foreign policy of soft power diplomacy, which is based on expanding trade and diplomatic partnerships to boost the country's economic interests. While the UAE's soft

power tools of fraternity and reconciliation help it secure an image of a cultural hub, it also assures the execution and achievement of long-term national goals of establishing strong international alliances. The geopolitics of tolerance and philanthropy help the UAE to gain a cultural understanding of their diplomatic partners and to forge strong bilateral associations.

Keywords: UAE, policy of tolerance, soft power, diaspora, public diplomacy, coexistence, economic alliances

Introduction

The UAE has often been referred to as the melting pot of tolerance, respect and acceptance of multiple diasporas. The country's policy of tolerance is directly linked to its soft power strategy, which aims to build on the UAE's strategic position by embracing both the Eastern and Western worlds and invest in cultural, economic and humanitarian diplomacy to welcome varied nationalities from across the world. The UAE's foreign policy, focusing on the framework of public diplomacy and integrated diplomatic action, consolidates its strong position as a soft power, not just in the MENA region but also globally, reflected in its ranking 10th internationally in the Global Soft Power Index of 2023.

Evolution of the UAE's Policy of Tolerance

The Constitution of the UAE encourages equality, freedom, respect and indiscrimination since its very inception in 1971. The UAE's abundant historical anecdotes highlight tolerance as a genuine value that the residents practised even before the formation of the Emirates. In the year 1951, an Emirati delegation including HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyn, who went on to become the Founder and the First President of the UAE, traveled to Europe and learned a lot about European culture and religion while visiting the famous Vatican in Rome and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. HH Sheikh Zayed referred to "tolerance" as the very essence of Islam, and that strengthening it would remove violence and terrorism.

Since the late 1950s, Sheikh Shakhbut, the then ruler of Abu Dhabi, started welcoming the first communities of Christian oil and gas workers to the Gulf, and the first Roman Catholic mass was held in Abu Dhabi in 1960 (Tolerance & Inclusion, MOFA 2020). The Abu Dhabi government, as a welcoming gesture, opened the St. Joseph's Church on the Abu Dhabi Corniche in 1965 and also donated land for the St Andrew's Anglican Church, which opened in 1968. The first Hindu temple in Dubai was also built as early as 1958. Since the unification of the Emirates in 1971, the UAE government has demonstrated its willingness to implement laws protecting religious freedom and fostering interfaith harmony. The temporary Constitution of the UAE, adopted in 1971, explicitly guaranteed freedom of religion to worshippers of all faiths; this was reaffirmed in 1996 when the Federal Supreme Council adopted the Constitution permanently. The UAE's vision for the Middle East is an alternative, future-oriented model that supports moderate Islam, embracing diversity and global engagement. The year 2019 was also proclaimed as "The Year of Tolerance" by the UAE President HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, placing emphasis on creating a tolerant society and underlining the significance of human communication (Year of Tolerance, MOEC 2019). The Emirati culture, by virtue of enhancing trade and contact with people of neighbouring regions, regardless of their ethnicity and religion, promotes the value of tolerance (Lootah, 2021).

The UAE's Soft Power Strategy of Tolerance

The UAE's de facto multiculturalism and concept of tolerance and integration have roots in its soft power strategy, which is the cornerstone of UAE foreign policy. Soft power is more than the ability to move people by argument or persuasion; it is the ability to attract people, with soft power also being termed "attractive power" (Nye, 2008). In international politics, it is argued by Joseph Nye that the resources that produce soft power arise largely from the values that a

country expresses in its culture, in the way it handles its relations with other nations, and in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies (Nye, 2008). Small countries are observed to have more flexible and creative foreign policy strategy (Katzenstein, 1985). The UAE's soft power policy of tolerance, respect and co-existence of different faiths make it an attractive destination for expatriates around the world. The cultural and religious diversity that the UAE provides have made it possible for Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jews and several others to call it their home. In a world of traditional power politics where governments compete to enhance their credibility of whose military or whose economy will win, the UAE's foreign policy of peace and anti-discrimination seems to be the right path for nation-building (Arquila & Ronfeldt, 1999).

Public diplomacy is an important tool of soft power policy, wherein nations try to attract people worldwide by drawing attention to potential resources through promoting cultural exports and arranging various cultural and art exchanges (Nye, 2008). For instance, the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017 is a portrayal of UAE's skillful strengthening of geopolitical ties with France through art and culture, as reinforced by the presence of the French President Emmanuel Macron at the inauguration ceremony. The UAE's foreign policy ties with India were solidified when during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's maiden trip to the Emirates in 2015, the UAE government allotted land for the building of the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi (Financial Express, 2015). This move by the UAE was also to please the huge Indian diaspora residing in Abu Dhabi, who would have to travel to Dubai, where the two Hindu temples of the Emirates are located, for prayers and offerings. This generous move by the UAE government was seen as a strong message that cultural and spiritual inclusiveness is the way forward for global harmony (Times of India, 2018). In February 2018, during his UAE visit, Indian Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation stone for the Abu Dhabi temple, which is now near completion. Aside from pleasing the Indians residing in the UAE, this noble gesture

also reinforces the guiding vision of tolerance and harmony of the founding fathers of the Emirates (Times of India, 2018). The monumental inauguration of the Abu Dhabi Hindu temple by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2024, will be instrumental in blending two cultures and two countries, in addition to appeasing the huge Indian diaspora of over three million people residing across the seven Emirates.

Joseph Nye explains that the soft power of a country depends primarily on its culture, its political values and its foreign policies. He further enunciates that culture is a set of practices that create meaning for a society and has several manifestations, like high culture, pertaining to art, literature and education and of more appeal to the elites, whereas popular culture focuses more on mass entertainment (Nye, 2008). Whether it is the presence of international campuses such as The New York University Abu Dhabi, Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, American University Dubai, the hosting of the Formula One auto race at the Yas Marina Circuit, or the hosting of the Bollywood IIFA Awards in Yas Island Abu Dhabi, the UAE has perfected the art of amalgamation of both high culture and popular culture in the true sense. This makes the UAE an attractive destination for people of both Western and Asian nations, making it a multicultural hub. The UAE is also largely dominated by Western style infrastructural developments like the construction of leisure theme islands like the Warner Brothers Studio and Ferrari World in Abu Dhabi, international museums like the Guggenheim and Louvre, British and American curriculum schools and universities, coupled with international brand restaurants pointing to the intensification of relationships between the Emiratis and Westerners, making it an attractive destination for most (Chaudior, 2010).

The UAE is home to diverse nationalities, and therefore the Emirati government continues to endorse fairness and impartiality in their law and governance (Gulf News, 2015). The UAE's commitment to peaceful amalgamation of their diaspora is evident in their anti-discriminatory speech law, formalised from 2015, to shield its varied nationalities from bigotry and hate speeches. The intention behind the law was

the protection of all diasporas and minorities from all forms of defamation and violent speech made offline or online on any social media platform. Such tolerant laws highlight the central tenet of the UAE's foreign policy of cultural diplomacy to attract expatriate populations from around the world. The promotion of cultural exchanges and religious freedom is a major tenet of the UAE's public diplomacy, and several social and cultural clubs such as the Italian Club, Indian Club, Egyptian Club, Sudanese Club and Jordanian Club have been established throughout the Emirates (Hussein, 2019).

Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and Minister of Presidential Affairs, said in 2019 that the UAE's soft power strategy was to increase the country's global reputation abroad by highlighting its identity, heritage, culture and contributions to the world. This highlights how the UAE's foreign policy of soft power is strongly guided by its culture and political values. He enunciated that the UAE's soft power strategy is based on four main objectives, which are to develop a unified direction for various sectors including the economy, humanities, tourism, media and science, and to promote the UAE's position as a gateway to the region (The National, 2019). Another main aim is to establish the UAE as a regional capital for culture, art and tourism, and to establish its reputation as a modern and tolerant country that welcomes all people from across the world. Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, the UAE's Minister of Tolerance in the year 2019, when UAE celebrated the Year of Tolerance, said that the UAE has turned to tolerance as its soft power strategy and emerged as a global model for a peaceful and prosperous nation (Sarkar, 2019). He further added that the Arabic-Islamic heritage and the UAE's founding father, Sheikh Zayed's, vision have aided the country in welcoming its diverse diasporas, engaging them in dialogue, understanding the differences and accepting the shared cultural values and reinstating them through education. Articulating the vision of the Ministry of Tolerance, Sheikh Nahyan said it "promotes tolerance by working with all of the country's residents cooperatively on activities such

as volunteer programs, advocacy, education and awareness raising, public events and celebrations, while all the time undertaking research about the drivers of tolerance and the causes of intolerance as well as determining strategies and monitoring progress" (Sarkar, 2019). This view of tolerance that the UAE upholds is deeply enshrined in the framework of the UAE's public diplomacy, which entails scientific, humanitarian and academic diplomacy, cultural and media diplomacy, people diplomacy, economic diplomacy and national representatives' diplomacy. The Deputy Minister of the UAE envisions the country's soft power strategy as including the culture, technology, art, science and economic sectors to establish diplomatic relations both in the MENA region and globally (The National, 2019).

Public Diplomacy and Tolerance

Public diplomacy, according to Joseph Nye, is an instrument that governments use to mobilises their resources of culture, art and literature to communicate with and attract different diasporas, rather than just maintaining diplomatic ties (Nye, 2008). The UAE has also institutionalised its policy of tolerance by establishing a Specific Ministry dedicated to Tolerance in 2016. Just as public diplomacy tries to captivate individuals by drawing attention to potential resources through broadcasting, cultural and religious exports, similarly the Ministry of Tolerance in UAE is tasked with implementing tolerance in the community, media, culture, education and workplace to attract expatriates internationally. The focal purpose is to solidify the UAE as the global capital for culture, dialogue between cultures and civilizations, and build a sophisticated and multifaceted foreign policy based on soft power and public diplomacy (Ardemagni, 2019).

Public diplomacy in the modern age is not just about communicating with expatriates, but about creating a compelling narrative that demonstrates how the proactive public diplomacy of a nation can reduce feelings of uncertainty and confusion (Manor, 2020). The greater the diplomatic

and global role a nation plays, the stronger the visibility of tolerance is in its national discourse and public diplomacy (Monier, 2023). The larger the diaspora of expatriates residing in a nation, the more important it becomes for that state to construct relations with its expatriates in way that does not undermine their legitimacy at domestic and international levels. The states must find a way to balance the needs of their expatriate population with that of their own citizens to maintain social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (Monier, 2023). For the UAE, therefore, it is of the utmost importance to mobilise a strong value-based public diplomacy strategy that advances its soft power strategy to gain the support of both the Emirati citizens and its diverse diaspora. The UAE government's main emphasis is on religious tolerance and coexistence so that the large expatriate population can form a robust source for constructiing soft power to influence international arenas through dialogues on interfaith matters such as the role of religion in politics (Shakman, 2012).

The constant incorporation of the tolerance discourse in the UAE's foreign policy narrative highlights how it has, with time, evolved into a wider strategy of statecraft, enhancing the attractiveness of the nation internationally to wider diasporas. However, public diplomacy should not be confused with propaganda and campaigns. Long-term culutural relationships varies with three different dimensions of public diplomacy that involve daily communication through social media and international press, strategic communication and long-standing relationships with key individuals through scholarships, exchanges, conferences and media channels (Leonard, 2002). The Emirati government promotes its peace and tolerance intitatives on social media and also on all their official government websites. The UAE has pushed back against the growing divisiveness across the world and followed a path of "moderate Islam", which promotes greater tolerance for all faiths and encourages acceptance and openness. The UAE is leading by example in the Middle East by making unique government policies, innovative partnerships and interfaith dialogues (Otaiba, 2016). The cornerstone for

the UAE government's strategic communication is the "Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies" (PEACEMS), which aims at reviving the humanistic values of all religions and the spirit of coexistence in Muslim societies and enhancing the role of the UAE in promoting peace, security and prosperity (PEACEMS, 2014). This alternative model of "moderate Islam" that the UAE encourages, alongside women's empowerment, welcomes multiple diasporas by embracing diversity, which has helped them in their national rebranding. The UAE has institutionalised tolerance domestically, while promoting the Emirati model of tolerance internationally; for instance, the National Program for Tolerance was launched in 2016 and in 2017 the International Institute for Tolerance was founded by the PM HH Shiekh al-Maktoum, the first one in the Gulf region. In 2018, the Emirati President, HH Sheikh Khalifa Al- Nahyan, announced the National Research Project on Tolerance, projecting the UAE as a global upholder of peace and soft power (Kourgiotis, 2020).

The UAE government's commitment towards protection of religious freedom, wherein the UAE Constitution gurantees freedom of worship to all, bears testament to the success of public diplomacy through strategic communication and maintaing interpersonal relationships with expatriates. A key accomplishment for the Emirati government on the public diplomacy tenet of maintaing long-standing relations with important indivuals has been the landmark visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the UAE in February 2019. The Pope was warmly received by the UAE President, HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and the Vice President and Prime Minister of Dubai, HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum. The Pope paid tribute and shared a peace message to more than a million Catholics residing in the UAE in a special mass that was organised in honour of the Papal visit in Abu Dhabi at Zayed Sports City (Embassy of the UAE, 2019). On the ocassion of Pope Francis' visit, the UAE announced its plans to create the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, which would include a church, a mosque and a synagogue, making it a place of learning, dialogue and worship, focused on

creating mutual understanding among people of all faiths and belief systems. This vision for the need of an interfaith centre emerged following the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the UAE in 2019, when the Pope joined with Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, to sign the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (Embassy of the UAE, 2019). A reflection of the values highlighted in this document, which is now present in the premises of the Abrahamic House, operational since early 2023, has served as a powerful platform for inspiring and nurturing understanding, openness and acceptance between people of all religions. The Abrahamic House, a multi-faith complex, has attracted positive global attention for its message of religious tolerance, serving UAE's public diplomacy strategy of gaining support from international media.

Education and scholarships for international students, the setting up of international universities such as NYU Abu Dhabi, Birmingham University Dubai and Canadian University Dubai, to name a few, for welcoming international diasporas in the field of higher education, has been the cornerstone of Emirati public diplomacy. The most exceptional aspect of the UAE's educational system both at school and university level is the functioning of multiple educational models to recognise and respect the diverse nationalities residing in the country (Boateng, 2021). Students of different nationalities in the country are often enrolled in different educational models engaging in varied inter-cultural exchanges, learning each other's national languages without having to move outside the country (Boateng, 2021). The numerous American and British Universities in the UAE are shaping UAE's soft power strategy of hosting thousands of international students who experience the local culture and inter-faith interactions and return to their home with a positive image of the Emirates (Masudi, 2019). Indian medical students displaced from Ukrainian universities due to the Russia–Ukraine war in early 2022 were accomodated with free seats and scholarships by the Gulf Medical University in Ajman, UAE. This initiative of the University of recognising these students as vital to the future

of healthcare delivery, ensuring that there is no gap in their education, came as a huge relief to the displaced students and also manifested UAE's remarkable public diplomacy intiative of encouraging exchange students and providing scholarships.

Soft Power Diplomacy and Forming International Alliances

The compatability between the UAE's foreign policy of soft power and public diplomacy have recently been highlighted by the historic signing of the Abraham Accords between the UAE, Israel and Bahrain, mediated by the United States, in September 2020. The peace deal with Israel has generated a synergistic effect for promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue between Israel and the Arab signatories and engaging the Jewish diaspora in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as unlocking valuable doors for economic cooperation and strategic bilateral relations (Jeong, 2021). With the normalisation of relations between the two nations, an interest among travellers of both nations has been generated; people who are anxious to investigate new destinations and also to enhance trade, alongside spreading UAE's inclusive vision of a regional community for progress. The Abraham Accords have not only enhanced the bilateral relations between the UAE and Israel but have also promoted regional security and strategic cooperation in the Middle East.

The 9/11 terror attacks brought about a massive recalibaration of the Emirati foreign policy, and the UAE foreign policy became committed to the US-led war against terrorism and extremism in all forms, including the Al Qaeda in Afgahnistan, Houthis in Yemen, ISIS in Syria, and Al Shabab in Somalia (Gokalp, 2020). The UAE renounced Islamic fundamentalism in all forms and followed a path of modearte Islam, making liberalism and openness the cornerstones of its foreign policy, aimed at attracting investors and encouraging diplomatic alliances. The UAE has since adopted a pragmatic approach towards both its regional neighbours and international partners, both to accommodate its diverse

diaspora, and for its economic benefits. The Emirati foreign policy is committed to boosting its economy by enhancing its influence, status and relative power through partnerships with not just international economies but also by diversifying its alliances at the regional level (Al Ketbi, 2020). Although during the Arab Spring in 2011, the UAE played the role of a strong regional actor, not shying away from robust military intervention, its foreign policy has shifted towards being a softer, more peaceful player now (Barhouma, 2022). This is evident in the UAE's forging of cordial relationship with Iran, which has been on the opposite side of the civil war in Yemen. The UAE's significant economic interests in Iran have been a major driving force in bolstering relations with Iran, and accounting for 68 per cent of Iran's imports.

Apart from the Middle East, UAE foreign policy has also focused its attention in creating robust alliances in the Asian region. In the year 2022, India and the UAE became signatories to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in an effort to boost their trade and economic ties. The trade agreement has not only enhanced bilateral trade between the two nations by 14%, with the UAE being India's third-largest trading partner, but also serves as a possible gateway to Africa and the European Union (Rannou, 2023). Accouting for approximately 38 per cent of the UAE population, the Indian community residing in the UAE also serves as an incentive for UAE's economic boost, making India its second-largest trading partner; they are also key allies in defense, with the two nations conducting joint military operations in the Gulf of Oman last month. The UAE's foreign policy of tolerance, acceptance and religious freedom has helped the nation gain a cultural understanding of diplomatic partners, forge deeper alliances and build on huge economic investments. For instance, the UAE-based retail giant Lulu International imports $80 billion worth of food and non-food products from India to supply the hypermarkets and supermarkets in the region to meet the needs of the Indian community. With enhanced trade relations with India, the Lulu Group India and the

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) signed a memorandum of understanding to further accelerate exports from India to the UAE (Kumar, 2023). The Indian diaspora in the UAE has played a significant role in enhancing the bilateral relationship between the two nations, serving as a link of connectivity, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation (Debroy, 2023). The UAE–India partnership is a driver for economic growth that creates trade and investment opportunities for over 3.8 billion people. The economic partnership contributes to the vitality of trade and investment flows in South Asia and through it towards regional and global markets.

The other major economic partner that the UAE has in Asia is China. The UAE, with its diversified economy and attractive taxation policies, has been a lucrative destination for the Chinese workforce. Additionally, the UAE's cosmopolitan culture, state-of-the-art public facilities, convenience of life, and easy access to Chinese groceries and products have made many in the community establish their roots in the country for decades (Zhang, 2023). China has tapped into the strategic location of the UAE, which serves as a gateway for Chinese products to flow into the MENA markets, bringing in more Chinese expatriates who are increasingly being recruited by several multinational corporations and retail sectors. The Emirati state-of-the-art infrastructure, family-oriented social and cultural environment and growing educational resources, such as the government-funded Chinese national curriculum school in Dubai, have encouraged Chinese expatriates to bring their families to the country (Wang, 2022). Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the exchanges between China and the UAE have further diversified, with the two nations upgrading their bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018; by 2019, China had become the UAE's largest non-oil trade partner and the fourth-largest source of tourists to Dubai. In spite of the grave challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in the last three years, China is still ranked as the UAE's largest trading partner (Wang, 2022).

Pakistan is another major ally of the UAE in the Asian region, given that a massive 1.7 million Pakistani diaspora members reside in the UAE. The two nations have maintained cordial bilateral relations for over fifty years, with growing economic cooperation in the fields of trade, energy, infrastructure, petroleum and several other avenues which have been beneficial for both economies. In conjunction with trade and commerce, the UAE has been a major donor of financial aid to Pakistan's struggling economy. According to the Pakistani Ambassador in the UAE, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, "Pakistanis consider the UAE their second home and vice versa. The close geographical proximity between the two countries gives a great opportunity to work together", adding that the Pakistani expatriates in the UAE are sending around $ 6.11 billion remittances home (Aamir, 2023). The Ambassador further highlighted that Pakistan and the UAE can collaborate on such sectors as IT, startups, Fintech and climate change. He explained that the vibrant Pakistani diaspora has a rich Islamic heritage and strong cultural values, which they want to promote in the UAE; this was effectively depicted in the Pakistani pavillion at the Dubai Expo 2020 (Aamir, 2023). The Pakistani Business Council, Pakistani Association of Dubai, Pakistani Professional Wing, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan (ICAP)-UAE Chapter Wing and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Alumni-UAE Chapter are some of the associations and community networks estabished by the Pakistani diaspora in the UAE that further their social and cultural interests. These organisations also prove to be platforms for community development and support systems wherein Pakistani expatriates can embrace their language and culture (Omar, 2020). To make its vibrant Pakistani diaspora feel at home, the UAE has facilitated the opening of many Pakistani schools, providing the students with the best possible learning environment and thereby welcoming the inflow of more Pakistani expatriates, investors and businesses.

The UAE's ability to diplomatically and effectively manoeuvre relations with most nations has also garnered

several criticisms, especially from Western governments. The UAE's neutrality on the Russia–Ukraine war has been viewed as a balancing act by the Emirati government, for whom Russia is a key ally in the Middle East. The UAE, over the years, has also cultivated an image of an effective mediator of international conflicts by hosting negotiations and brokering peace between nations, as part of its soft power politics, especially to impress and attract foreign investors (Boateng, 2021).

Conclusion

The Emirati leadership has been successful in the creation of a global image of the UAE as the socially inclusive cultural hub of the Middle East. As originally contextualised by Joseph Nye, the use of force and military prowess for economic gain is too costly and dangerous for modern great powers, whereas soft power capabilities such as effective communication, national cohesion and universalistic culture helps nations attain "great power" status both regionally and internationally (Nye, 1990). The soft power resources of cultural attraction, social cohesion, public diplomacy and religious tolerance have provided the UAE with more opportunities and economic gains, ranking first in the Middle East and Arab regions and 20th globally in the Economic Opportunity Rankings. Such attractive rankings and the tolerant policies of the government are sure to play an instrumental role in accelerating a significant migration of global businesses and people from other popular hubs like China, India, the US, UK, Luxembourg, Switzerland, France, Italy, Singapore and Hong Kong to the Emirates (Emirates News Agency, 2023).

In the post-pandemic era, the UAE introduced more pragmatic economic reforms, such as individuals above the age of 21 no longer needing to buy a special license to purchase alcohol, and decriminalising alcohol consumption, which was a welcome move for most expatriates. Other economic reforms with more secular leanings include stricter laws against harrassment of women, and lifting the ban on unmarried

couples sharing accommodation, which was a source of huge stress for many Western expatriates residing in the Emirates (Syal, 2020). The UAE government also made extensive efforts during the pandemic to achieve complete vaccination, and expedited this process so that expatriates felt safe to return to the country to work. The UAE has made several key social changes in recent years, such as adding sexual harrasment to their penal code and including men to be recognised as potential victims as well. The new rules also decriminalise suicide, addressing mental health issues and bringing a glimmer of hope for many international students in the UAE who feel that they will have greater access to mental health facilities (Syal, 2020). The aim of such reforms is to boost the UAE's social and economic standing and also to depict the shift in cultural attitudes of the UAE to accommodate the increasing needs of their diverse diaspora.

With visionary strategies of multiculturalism, unmatched infrastructure, and an environment that nourishes growth, the UAE has emerged as an epicentre of tolerance and prosperity. The constant inflow of a migrant diaspora to the UAE is essential for ensuring commercial diversification of the Emirati economy, and hence, the principles of social cohesion and cultural appreciation are vital for sustaining their legitimacy in the country. The UAE's expatriate population is key to the nation's economic prosperity, and to attract high-skilled workers, many residency and visa schemes have been introduced since the pandemic in 2020. The Dubai government has even rolled out several cultural visas to attract more talented artists, creators and highly skilled expatriates. This multitude of visa initiatives forms part of the UAE's public diplomacy to retain foreign expatriates. Amongst the Emirates, while Abu Dhabi and Dubai aim to attract divergent diasporas through tolerant working and living policies, Sharjah, the other popular Emirate, brands itself as the cultural capital of UAE, regularly hosting several book fairs and other cultural activities that make expatriates feel at home.

The promotion of the tolerance narrative is imperative for building an international image that attracts diverse

people and businesses into the country, enhancing diplomatic partnerships globally. This proves Nye's concept that cultural and ideological attraction are universal, and through soft power capabilities, effective public diplomacy and communication, emerging powers such as the UAE can coexist sustainably with its predominantly non-citizen multicultural diaspora, while formulating economic alliances that augment UAE's influence internationally.

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Chapter 9

Multicultural Approach of Indian Diaspora in the UAE: Examining Diaspora, Identity and Media

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Abstract

In my chapter, I analyse how the multicultural approach of the Indian diaspora has changed historically in the UAE, while examining it from an inclusive perspective. Diaspora people change from who they were at their origins and contribute to the sociocultural heterogeneity of their diaspora. A social change results in regarding migration as rooted in the distinctive insight of society and its transformations: it is a segment of the transformation process that is neither a reason nor a result of social change. This essay argues that to understand the chronological growth of the Indian diaspora in the UAE, one must connect local-level migration experiences with other socio-spatial levels. Doing so will help one to better comprehend the current dynamics in which migration, identity, the media, economics and politics are all intertwined.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Media, Indian Diaspora, Soft Power, Bollywood

Introduction

Diaspora is a term used to describe various migratory groups that have left their native countries but have a strong sense of national, religious, or ethno-national distinctiveness. Subsequently, in the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, the description of "diaspora" has grown to incorporate more ethnic and racial groups and more emphasis has been placed on hybridity, which is an essential mechanism of diasporic identity. The term "diaspora" or "tokens of a single diaspora" has come to refer to those seeking refuge, expatriates, trading groups, guest workers, exiles, immigrants, forced migrants, asylum, and ethnic communities of numerous kinds (Cohen, 2008). Liberal multiculturalism's disparities result from its strong emphasis on national cohesion rather than its poor commitment to diversity. Thus, multicultural ideologies support liberal regimes where nostalgia for the real past plays a significant role in the formation of citizenship and political consciousness.

The dispersed configurations of diasporas and the numerous impacts they have on their several groups may lead to conflicting observations of the shared identity and blur the boundaries of authority. Nevertheless, despite the reduction of sociocultural barriers, some retention in diasporic groups is still empowered by intercontinental interchanges and yields them a major factor in the multiculturalisation of their current surroundings. The transcontinental diasporas exhibit two separate magnitudes, i.e., the socio-cultural heterogenisation of contemporary global socio-cultural reality and the power of multiculturalisation. This reality encompasses adversities as well as solace. The diaspora members frequently experience such a sense of comfort in their new environment that, despite any prejudices that may be aimed at them, they voluntarily and outwardly proclaim their uniqueness and depict this environment as a true—possibly their first—homeland (Knott, 2010).

Some academics now refer to "hybridisation" as a characteristic of modern social dynamics because of these

processes. The term "cultural hybridisation" refers to the borrowing by one culture of the norms and values of another. The result includes both the formation of new in-between categories and alterations brought on by cross-cultural interactions. Analysts who disapprove of "objectivist" approaches to collective entities criticise this idea. In the current context, hybridisation is useful since it identifies a significant source of recent cultural advances. Additionally, it increases the analyst's awareness of the overall impact of the evolution of cultures on multiculturalism in terms of inventions and symbolic blending. The result is a propensity for social borders to be more fluid, which allows participants to reflect on and reinterpret their identities in the never-ending discussions that characterise modern intellectual undertakings.

Multiculturalism and Problems of Diversity

Multiculturalism is a society or a world where multiple cultural and ethnic sets are present and are deemed to have political magnitude, as well as a programme or policy that espouses such a culture. Political theorists strive to approach multiculturalism's concerns, yet there is strong disagreement on what constitutes fair treatment. Given the significance that different cultures have for different people or even for society, multiculturalism may imply the granting of entitled privileges both individual and communal. To provide evenly balanced access to the assistance that social involvement brings and avoid unfairly benefiting major clusters of societies, a multicultural government may therefore be one in which different levels of acknowledgement are given to cultural clusters. In contrast, it could be argued that, exactly because of the great cultural and social multiplicity, the state should uphold its neutral stance towards groups and ensure that core democratic rights are fairly and unswervingly imposed across cultural differences. Allowing recognition of groups runs the danger of "politicising" modes of ethnic identity that are best retained out of local decision-making involving the allocation

of resources and commodities. This could compromise personal security and interests. These thoughts manifest not only contrary hypotheses regarding the correlation between cultures and our well-being but also philosophical debates over what freedom and equality are.

The ideals of political life that have been advanced throughout much of the history of Western political thought have assumed that individuals share not only a common political position but also a common language, ancestry and culture. This is evident in Greece where, despite Aristotle being a resident alien of Athens, he was one of the key players in the development of Western political theory. J.S. Mill, a supporter of individual freedom, believed that liberal organisations were impossible among a population without fellow feelings or who spoke and read other dialects. According to him, a state's borders should in the main equal those of ethnicities (Mill, 1975). The assumption that governments should be culturally homogeneous was linked to several problems that still plague current political thinkers, as well as, no doubt, simple prejudice against outsiders and foreigners. Among these is whether a shared culture is necessary for justice to inspire the goodwill and sacrifice that it generally calls for from citizens. Can a civic society be strong and sturdy if its people and cultures are too diversely represented? If the citizens of a state speak numerous languages, hold diverse views, and yet understand their country's history differently, can a representative association function and be viewed as authentic? Can we strike a compromise between the needs of cultures and the demands for equality if people are inherently equal? Western philosophers from Aristotle to Mill (and beyond) have served to respond negatively to these problems; they believe that too much cultural diversity endangers the prospects for a society that is peaceful, affluent and ultimately just. The issue is that it is impossible to avoid the difficulties presented by cultural variety. Witnessing the resurgence of nationalism, the banquet of ferocious ethnic wars in South-East Asia, Africa and Europe, and the unusual movement of people absconding from cultural and economic

torture, the history of the twentieth century, and particularly of the last few eras, makes this copiously clear. But first, what do political philosophers mean when they mention cultural diversity? Culture and ethnicity were frequently linked in the nineteenth century, leading to conclusions about the intrinsic dominance of one form of ethnicity over another. This trend persisted into the twentieth century, manifesting itself in violent ways. Thus, the idea of correlating cultural features with biological or quasi-logical traits has come to be regarded as exceedingly dubious, entailing both shoddy science and ethically dubious practices. Instead, anthropologists (among many) have discussed that culture should be recognised as a collection of ultimately flexible and accessible social and cognitive backgrounds that govern individual behaviour. These frameworks are complicated, vigorous rather than stationary, and brought together from different sources rather than being woven from equivalent material.

Speaking of societal ethos or even a single multi-ethnic culture runs the risk of excluding the intrinsic diversity and hybridity of cultural and political identities because there is no identity without heterogeneity. The major goal of justice should be to remain analytically receptive to this agility and multiplicity rather than reaffirm found or existing cultural formations because people and clusters are made up of a variety of ethical foundations (Connolly, 1995; Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, the term "multicultural politics" alludes to the idea that social and political change is required because of social and cultural variety.

Reasons for Indian Diaspora in the UAE

It is crucial to investigate the circumstances and background that led to Indians leaving their ancestral lands. The first wave of contemporary Indian immigration began in the 19th century for the following reasons:

- **Linguistic affinity, linkages, and socio-ethnic empathy:** Although the outmoded social hindrances the passage of talent across countries as variances in

linguistic, social behaviour, and cultural traits are less of an impairment to highly knowledgeable migrants, the presence of these characteristics can indisputably promote the enablement of global migration. The large-scale emigration to the UAE is therefore perceived as a deliberate choice because of pre-existing migratory patterns, ancestral and kinship ties, and determined diaspora associations (Birks, 1980). The decision to move the family is also influenced by factors such as how easily they will adjust, how familiar things will be, and social links. As the migrant family moves, they establish and retain their cultural linkages, which facilitates emigration from Indian collaborators and neighbours (Fargues, 2011).

- **Demand for wealth and aptitude:** Considering the high levels of underemployment in India and the UAE, which are both driven by the need for directly prolific aptitude in the workforce, a migration drift will unavoidably form in the direction of the nation with the best economic prospects. India has a sizable pool of highly qualified, English-speaking workers who can cover the labour shortages in these economies (Jain, 2005). In contrast, the UAE experiences acute local labour shortages due to a demographic disparity, which has given Indians the chance to work in the UAE. Although the extensive development projects launched in the UAE after the oil boom initially required a higher dependence on low-skilled workers than entrepreneurs and white-collar professionals, only a few entrepreneurs were of the view that demand for wealth and aptitude in the form of talent was their motivation for emigrating.
- **Transfer of funds:** This essential element of migration is frequently referred to as the transfer or flow of migrant wages from outside their nations of origin to their homeland. Global development agendas have recently grown to rely on migrant remittances, which are now a crucial part of any poor country's balance of payments (Gabi, 2012). Similarly, remittances from Indians living abroad include payments made to household

members and their means of subsistence exclusive to India, as well as domestic withdrawals from NRI rupee deposits, non-resident external rupee accounts, and non-resident regular deposit schemes. Such private, unrequited transfers are accounted for in the current account of the home country's balance of payments and, as a result, have a significant impact on the country's available income. The Indian economy also continues to benefit greatly from remittances, since it is the largest beneficiary of remittances in the world.

- **Policy regimes and immigration policies:** Economic and governmental policies ultimately have an impact on the migration of people between countries. The decision to remain, depart, or restore is determined by the general policy framework in the host and home countries. The vigorous nature of policy implications means that they have the potential to drastically alter migration trends as well as the rules governing foreigners' entry and exit from the country. Until recently, substantial numbers of Indian migrants, who suffer unfavourable political conditions like officialdom and unpredictability back home, were drawn to the UAE because of the economy's need for skills and the liberalisation of immigration and economic policies. Numerous immigrants and businesspeople have been able to create global companies in only a few days and lift their families out of poverty in India because of the tax-free appeal and free economic zones of the UAE (Keane, 2008). However, with growing concerns among the native population about the dominance and overdependence on Indian expatriates, these worries may eventually lead to the introduction of stringent immigration laws and nationality quotas.

Indian Diaspora in the UAE

Due to trade and other commercial ties between India and the various Emirates of the UAE, Indian engagement with the

UAE extends back several centuries. It stands out from every other expatriate community in the UAE due to its breadth in terms of numbers and depth in terms of the types of workers it employs. Before the 1958 petroleum discovery, the UAE's economy was based primarily on low-tech pursuits like pearl diving, subsistence farming, fishing, and herding, which caused a variety of migrant flows, including traders from Persia, the Indian subcontinent, and Baluchi families. The local labour force ended their age-old work. It moved to the new oil-manufacturing regions where income was attractive and stable after modest amounts of oil were discovered in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Errichiello, 2021). Petroleum, the country's primary economic resource, had a significant impact on the economy and communal life of the Emirates, granting funding for massive development projects that were undertaken as soon as the country gained independence in 1971 (Sh'arawi, 2004). Remarkable changes in the economic and demographic makeup of the Emirates were sparked by the oil boom of 1973. Whereas formerly the UAE was underdeveloped, with high fertility rates, poor educational attainment, low levels of industrial and service employment, and inadequate infrastructure for communication, transportation or industries (Birks & Sinclair, 1980), the immense oil profits enabled the UAE to "bypass the traditional stages of capital accumulation experienced by developed countries and to jump directly to the stage of mass consumption" (Shihab, 2001). The establishment of the Internet, media cities and free zones, as well as the growth of the tourism, financial and commercial sectors, are just a few of the ambitious development initiatives that the UAE has initiated in several different economic areas. Its operation and the anticipated growth were strongly reliant on the importation of foreign labour, particularly highly qualified experts with a variety of specialisations. These already-established mercantile families were joined by "new" immigrants who gradually surfaced in three recorded waves of migration: mass immigration following the oil boom in 1973, mass immigration in response to restrictive immigration policies, and the need for skilled workers for development projects in 1990, and mass immigration because

of skyrocketing oil prices in 2000 (Kumar, 2014). The effect of the expatriate community in the UAE is blatantly obvious. The country and its workforce have been characterised by large-scale immigration and surges of migrant influx, which numerically dominate at every occupational level and rapidly yield a demographic imbalance.

The Indian merchant community in the Gulf region prospered during the eighteenth century. Previously, the Indian merchant diaspora had established their base in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions, with pearls replacing dates and gemstones in the historic Silk Routes' international export of spices and textiles. The wealthy colonies of Gujarati traders and Sindhis, who loved religious liberties, not only played a foremost role in maritime trade and finance, serving as agents for government contractors, importers, exporters, bankers and local merchants (Suter, 2005) but also impacted the GCC countries in terms of initial modernisation, cultural renaissance, reform movements, and facets of sociocultural life (Jain, 2005). The Indian diaspora has contributed significantly to India's expansion and success over the course of the economic reform period.

- **Labour:** The UAE is the top destination for Indian migrant workers in the Gulf, followed by Saudi Arabia and Oman. The GCC nations had to make significant human resource expenditures in the early 1970s to carry out development operations in the fields of infrastructure, communications, agriculture, industry and transport. As the economy of the Gulf states grew dramatically in the decades that followed, the numbers gradually increased. Due to a lack of local labour, the Gulf region began to invite international labour. Destitute South Asian workers were willing to accept lower wages and low-skilled jobs. Gulf countries were especially attracted to hiring more labourers from these regions. A change in trend can be seen if we examine the regional pattern in the migration of Indian workers: workers primarily came from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu during the initial phase of labour migration from

India to the Gulf, but more recently, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Goa, and Bihar have emerged as the top states for menial workers' emigration. Due to its proximity to India and the associated financial benefits, Indian labourers choose to work in the Gulf region, where they continue to make up a significant portion of the labour force. However, white-collar workers were in great demand as they were highly skilled and technically trained professionals working in government agencies and public-sector businesses, earning enormous salaries and emoluments. Indian professionals can afford to bring their families with them to the UAE because of the high basic income criteria established by the UAE government, and children are allowed to live with their parents until they complete their education.

The phrase "temporary migration" to the GCC countries refers to movement, but many workers stay in the Gulf for a long time, increasing the number of second and third-generation migrants. Though Saudi Arabia places many limitations on exercising one's faith or erecting a Christian church or Hindu temple, other nations, such as the UAE and Bahrain, have more tolerant cultures that allow for the free expression of migrant groups' cultural norms and beliefs. However, there has not been much overall sociocultural collaboration or incorporation of immigrant communities in the Gulf states. Regardless of playing a significant role in building their economies, the problem of migrant rights has been essentially overlooked by the GCC. Presently, immigrants have little access to, if any, of the social, civil, and political rights correlated with citizenship, meaning they have no chance of assimilation.

- **Soft Power:** India's scope for soft power has been widened by showcasing its social and cultural ideals on multiple stages and in varied settings. The Indian Social Centre, Al Ain, the Indian Tamil Fine Arts Association in the UAE, and Indian Social and Cultural Centre in Abu Dhabi are some of the Indian associations that have been effective in the UAE through authorised

> registration in the host states. Indian cultural activity infuses the region with some much-needed dynamism, and Indians continue to be the favoured immigrant community due to their extraordinary levels of technical proficiency and discipline, ability to easily adapt to the lifestyle in the UAE, and reputation for being kind and understanding people.

Numerous schools with an Indian curriculum and affiliations to organisations such as the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) have been founded in the area by professionals and white-collar Indians. In Dubai, there are branches of Indian universities, including the Manipal University, I.G.N.O.U, and Birla Institute of Technology and Science that provide engineering, management, and medical guidance for both the public and commercial sectors. Additionally, research institutes like the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi concentrate primarily on researching India's foreign policy ingenuities while vigorously collaborating with its academicians and decision-makers.

Contracting and Negotiating Indian identity and Media

The Indian diasporic identity is constructed, negotiated and transmitted by three main actors: First, ethnic Indian media in the UAE; second, Indian cinema commerce; and third, commercial interaction with global and local businesses.

Ethnic Indian Media in the UAE

Over the past two decades, the Indian media has experienced an unheard-of expansion. Increased democratic engagement will not necessarily result from this growth, because the entire concept of the "public" has changed, as seen by the media's ideological coverage, the public sphere's international membership, and the interactive nature of the public. Ethnic media are media produced for a particular ethnic community.

Global Indian Television, for example, is a television show produced by Symphony TV, an independent, Kerala-based producer that caters to the sizable Gulf-based Malayalam-speaking diaspora from the south Indian state of Kerala. Similarly, privately-owned Indian radio stations like Radio Mirchi in Abu Dhabi (97.3 FM) and Big FM in Dubai (106.2 FM) operate in the UAE and mostly hire vernacular speakers from different regions of India to serve as presenters.

Indian Cinema Commerce and Over-Nativeness

The UAE now boasts the greatest box office in the Middle East, with Dubai and Abu Dhabi, its two main cities, accounting for the majority of this. Although several social, religious, linguistic and cultural organisations play a significant role in preserving and promoting Indianness among Indians in America, their combined influence cannot compare to that of "Bollywood". Bollywood, the Hollywood of Bombay, is the world's biggest film producer. Its movies, dance, music, and artworks have become synonymous with a globally recognised identity. Hindi films are widely distributed and advocate for traditional Indian values and the idea of "unity in diversity". They represent the triumph of Indianness over non-Indian ideals, are melodramatic in style and packed with music and dances. These qualities are appealing to non-Indians as well as to Indians living abroad and within India. One example is the Middle East, where nearly all Hindi films have Arabic subtitles, even though most Indians do not speak Arabic (Bose, 2006).

Films by filmmakers like Nikhil Advani, Aditya Chopra and Koran Johar appeal to higher middle-class Indian diaspora residents and aim to reinforce the optimistic bonds of culture, religion and Hindu ethnicity that can be construed almost exclusively through the lens of diaspora; secondly, such Indian diasporas were encouraged to consolidate an emotional and national identification by investing financially in Indian cinema. The amalgamation of internationally disseminated motion pictures and a commercial financial set-up dictated by the international marketplace rather than the nation, reflects

the prominence of the Non-Returning Indian as an optimistic, energetic character who subscribes to and supports national values in the diaspora, one that reflects the ideologies of class, religion, and gender with a transnational Hindutva modernism and entrepreneurial consumerism.

Zed Aflam (2009), Zed Alwan (2012), and MBC Bollywood (2013) are three cable and satellite television stations with dedicated Bollywood content that have been launched in the UAE in the past ten years. Most of this content is dubbed into Arabic and is largely aimed at the local Emirati audience. Hindi film producers appeared to be leaning towards Arabic phrases and tunes to appeal to Arabic audiences, evident in the current popularity of "Bollywood in Arabic" in terms of Hindi cinema utilisation today. Certain legendary Hindi movies like Ali Baba and Chalis Chor had a song called "Khatooba"; the film Ek Tha Tiger had a melodious beat song called "Mashah'allah", and "Ya Ali", a song from the film Gangster has an Arabic influence which establishes a great interrelation with Arabic and Indian spectators and forces them to dance to Arabic music.

Dubai is home to the world's first Bollywood theme park that is creditable and praiseworthy in the UAE. The Government's neoteric decision to provide a ten-year Golden Visa to Bollywood actors built a stronger relationship. The drive-in movie theatre experience in locations like the Mall of the Emirates, Zabeel Park, and Dubai Hill Estate gave its audiences a tremendous cinematic experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The recently opened Madame Tussauds in Dubai exhibits wax sculptures with seven themed zones and over 60 lifelike wax statues. Visitors can dance in front of a digital interactive screen in the Bollywood section. It has numerous Bollywood celebrities like Salman Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Shahrukh Khan, Katrina Kaif, and many more. Recent hit films like Dangal (2016) and Pathan (2023) ranked in the region as one of the most-watched movies, with massive box office takings and huge profits. The major box office collection markets for Indian film producers, particularly those in Bollywood and Mollywood (Malayalam), are the UAE cinema markets.

Numerous Indian expatriates live and work in the UAE, demonstrating the long-standing cultural ties between the two nations. Bollywood's dance, music and movies are well-known and cherished elements of Indian culture. Bollywood films are primarily in Hindi, a common language throughout the Indian community in the UAE, giving Indians who live abroad a sense of comfort and familiarity. Because of this, they can appreciate the films and comprehend the plots, which makes Bollywood an essential aspect of their cultural exposure. Over the years, Bollywood's popularity in the UAE has continuously increased, making it one of the top marketplaces for Bollywood films (Indiana, 2021). In conclusion, Bollywood gives the Indian population in the UAE a cultural link and a sense of home. Its vast appeal and popularity have contributed to the nation's entertainment industry.

Commercial Interaction with global and local business

Traditional wooden dhows from the Gulf would dock in Indian ports and bring back spices, tea, cotton, indigo, and teak along with their cargoes of incense, gold, and dates. Hindustani is a language that many Arabs in the UAE speak, and shops still call the dirham, the country's currency, rupiah—a holdover from the British era when Indian rupees could be exchanged for it. Standing in the center of Dubai's bustling Meena Bazaar, it is not difficult to picture yourself 1 200 kilometres away in Mumbai on the other side of the Arabian Sea. Names like Biryaniwalla & Co., Mini Punjab Restaurant, and Tanishq Jewellery may be found in the lanes. Communication can be accomplished in Malayalam, Hindi, and Arabic. The financial institution that towers over Dubai Creek and is under the control of the Indian government is the Bank of Baroda.

A senior or middle-level Indian professional is often employed by a well-established Bahraini corporate organisation in an operational or advisory capacity. Indians are found in senior- or middle-management positions at prestigious Bahraini corporate houses like Mohammed Jalal,

Ahmed Mansour Al Ali, Bahrain Aluminium, Zayanis or Al-Moayyads, as well as in petrochemical and ship repair firms. Several Non-Resident Indians and People of Indian Origin have also set up businesses, and humanitarian and educational institutions in the region. For example, Dr. Shetty established UAE Exchange in the year 1980 which deals with remittances and foreign exchange in over thirty countries across the world. The significant Indian expatriate community leaders in UAE, Mr. Bava Pandalingal and Mr. Vasudev Shamdas Shroff were presented with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award in January 2013 and January 2017, respectively. As the first female gynaecologist from India, Dr Zulekha Daud relocated to the UAE in 1964 and has also been honoured with the award in 2019.

Almost every substantial Indian organisation has a presence in the UAE through trade and investment, or a representative office; several Indian businesses have opened local offices or industrial facilities there. Many Indians also operate hypermarkets and name-branded businesses, such as the Lulu Group, which has locations in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The key drivers of the rise of Indian economic interests in the Gulf area include safe markets, favourable dividend payments, and close political and ethnic links. The development of strong trade ties between India and the UAE is significantly influenced by the diaspora factor. The UAE is home to 1.2 million Emiratis and over 3.5 million Indians. India is a source of food, diamonds, jewellery, leather, people, pharmaceuticals, and business prospects for this region. For India, the UAE is an essential source of cash and, increasingly, a location where Indian businesses can effectively connect with global markets without being hindered by the oppressive red tape, snarling traffic, backed-up airport immigration lines, and harsh taxes of their own country. When the Meena Bazaar received its name in 1973, an establishment selling Indian saris, this relationship would have been unfathomable. Abu Dhabi was in abject poverty. The lack of desalination resulted in frequently brackish water. The local currency up until 1966 was a variant of the Indian rupee known as the "external

rupee". The Trucial States, a group of tribal lands connected by antiquated treaties, were what became known as the UAE only in 1971. Nearly all the world's trade, which (pre-oil) mostly involved stones, pearls, and diamonds, flowed via Bombay. After fifty years, the situation had completely changed. The most cutting-edge products in the world may be found in crowded Emirati malls. The 68-story Almas Tower in Dubai is occupied by Indian gem traders, who are driven by restaurants like Mumbai Masala and Delhi Darbar Express on the first floor. Manu Chhabria, whose main company, Jumbo, is based in Dubai, is arguably one of the most well-known Indians with a presence in the UAE. Jumbo was founded in 1974 and currently represents numerous global brands, including Sony, Electrolux, Supra, Ricoh, Casio and Krups. Chhabria has even established businesses in Germany, the United States, Japan, the UK and Hong Kong.

The UAE's tax approach is attractive, i.e., there are no personal taxes. Indian income taxes, in comparison, are close to 40% and are added to hefty consumption levies. In India, corporate income taxes are not only more expensive but also more complicated than ever. However, conducting business in the UAE is not simple. The market is cutthroat and value driven. Indian brands including Amul, Bru, and Hawkin's pressure cookers are widely available. Indians primarily purchase them. The Indus Valley rice produced by Hindustan Lever is marketed to the neighbourhood Arabs. STC, MMTC, Tata Exports, and ITC are Indian businesses with regional headquarters in the UAE. India and the UAE signed agreements in July 2023 about trade settlement in national currencies and establishing a real-time interface for cross-border transactions. Following the adoption of the new trade settlement system, the first transaction involved the export of 25 kg of gold to the YES Bank in Mumbai for a rupee payment of Rs. twelve crores. De-dollarisation is particularly important because the UAE is India's second-largest supplier of LPG and LNG and its fourth-largest supplier of crude oil.

Indian Diaspora Challenges

The UAE faces a significant difficulty because of the large number of expatriates and diaspora members living there, which jeopardises their domestic labour forces and alters the social structures of these nations.

Social, Economic and Political Issues

The fundamental goal of UAE labour laws over the years has been to closely control the imported labour force and make sure that it is only transitory in nature. However, a worker sponsorship programme known as kafala, where the state delegates migrant workers' immigration and employment status to a private employer, has come under increasing worldwide criticism, including from India. In many different industries, it is said that there is an abuse of the sponsorship system, as well as dangerous working environments, insufficient housing, economic hardships, and worker human rights abuses. Migration from India has mostly met the demand in the UAE for low-category labour including domestic helpers, chefs, carriers, and gardeners. This group of workers, however, is not covered by any local labour regulations. In several Gulf nations, housemaids and governesses are exposed to mistreatment, including occasionally sexual abuse. Workers who are unskilled or semi-skilled are typically housed in confined quarters in makeshift camps with subpar amenities while working on infrastructure and development projects. Unfavourable working circumstances, unfavourable weather, a lack of social opportunities, and protracted absence from family members tend to cause mental stress for the unskilled Indian diaspora in the UAE. Moreover, the workers and labourers are not allowed to take part in any protest. Additionally, even after being in the UAE for several years, they are not granted citizenship as there are stringent naturalisation and citizenship laws.

Security Impasse

The Gulf region faces new difficulties in the twenty-first century, including internal Islamist terrorism, the fragility of UAE-Iran relations, and concerns over regional defence and collective security. The violent attempts to overthrow dictatorial regimes in West Asia that followed the so-called "Arab Spring" have spread to the Gulf nations, causing panic among diaspora communities who fear that stability, employment, and a safe return to their home countries may be at risk. Although India has been able to maintain close ties with all nations and is unlikely to face significant difficulties in coping with the rapidly shifting balance of power in the Gulf, it still needs to be aware of several immediate threats in the area, including the widening Shia-Sunni divide, Arab fears of a Shia takeover led by Iran, and the possibility of a permanent US military presence in the Gulf and its effects on extremism, rapid shifts in the region's social and political systems, the pursuit of nuclear and other weapons capabilities, and growing public resentment. In the long run, India's ability to implement New Delhi's "Look West Policy", which aims to improve ties with all the countries in the region, depends critically on its ability to comprehend the difficulties that the Gulf region faces. Even though the mere existence of superpowers like the USA and China may not hurt the Indian diaspora's role and soft power potential in the Gulf, covert barriers to Indian migration to the Gulf and political and social development may discourage India's efforts to project soft power in the region.

Conclusion

The Indian diaspora has considerably shaped and influenced world dynamics, adding to the complex fabric of diversity. Indians have dispersed around the world, resulting in a blending of cultures and the emergence of hybrid identities. The Indian diaspora frequently creates distinctive cultural fusions by fusing aspects of their native country with the local

customs of their new nations. This process of globalisation has included the development of Indian enterprises, media, and cultural traditions, which have influenced and been influenced by other world cultures. Transnational linkages have been made possible by technologies and communication systems, which have enabled diaspora populations to maintain ties to their homelands and make contributions to the advancement of both their home and host nations. The world is now more culturally diverse and interwoven because of the diaspora's active participation in international politics. The diaspora of Indians has made substantial economic, knowledge-sharing, and exchange programme contributions to the global phenomena. The Indian diaspora in the UAE adopts a multicultural approach that incorporates media interactions, identity development, and diaspora dynamics in a complex way. Fostering a greater understanding of the experiences and contributions of the Indian diaspora in the UAE requires an understanding of these dynamics. The protracted stay of Indian migrants in the UAE has contributed to laying the groundwork for a solid bilateral connection between India and the UAE. The Indian community significantly impacts both India and the UAE's economic progress. In addition to trade, commerce and investment, both nations stand to gain from the expanding energy collaboration between India and the UAE. Given this, both countries should concentrate on the Indian diaspora in the United Arab Emirates. This might be a useful tool for developing this connection. However, there remain issues that Indians in the UAE need to be fixed. Indian workers complain most frequently about their poor living and working conditions, workplace discrimination, illegal stealing of passports, and other violations of their human rights. The governments of India and the GCC nations should take rapid steps for the welfare of these employees, so to positively strengthen the Indian diaspora.

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Chapter 10

Roots of Identity: Unpacking Memories in Indian and Pakistani Diasporas in the UAE

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Abstract

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the very complicated interplay of memory and identity formation applicable to the specific population of the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has one of the largest expatriate populations in the world, and Indians and Pakistanis hold the biggest diasporic communities amongst them. They are also one of the most culturally diverse expatriate communities in the UAE, having brought with them a rich melting pot of traditions, narratives, food, culture and memories that provide a structure to their sense of self in the foreign land. This chapter explores various theoretical frameworks in order to understand the factors that contribute to the formation of hyphenated identity in the diasporic community. The theories also help examine the role of individual and collective memory in shaping the self-perception of diasporic populations in a multicultural society like the UAE. A small section of the chapter also explores the historical context of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora in the UAE. Their shared historical memories still impact the integration process of both communities in the host country. Although this process of integration is fairly seamless, it comes with its own challenges. Some of the biggest challenges explored in this chapter are the navigation between dual identities

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in the diasporic population and cultural integration. An overall understanding of the diaspora population helps promote empathy, tolerance and a more informed citizenry. For both the diaspora population and the host population, this knowledge helps build social cohesion, cultural exchange and diversity.

Keywords: Indian, Pakistani, Diaspora, Expatriate, United Arab Emirates, Memory, Identity

Introduction

"my mother thinks i'm a living proof of cultural appropriation
but aren't i a foreigner in my own country
an outsider
but only on the inside"
- Xayaat Muhummed,
The Breast Mountains of All Time Are in Hargeisa

The above quote is from a poetry book about first-generation diaspora and immigrants (amongst other things). This book is an excellent example of an essential and commendable shift towards increasing representation of diaspora and immigrants in various art, literature, and media forms. The awakening of these marginalised voices slowly makes us aware of the universal threads that connect us all. This is leading to a deeper appreciation of human experiences and the strength that comes from embracing our differences.

Such diaspora groups include the Indian and the Pakistani diaspora in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE, because of its expatriate-welcoming laws and multicultural settings, has emerged as a global hub, attracting individuals from various nationalities and backgrounds from all over the world. As people seeking better economic opportunities, career growth and a high standard of living flock to the UAE, the country's culture becomes more diverse and vibrant, forming a perfect cosmopolitan society. According to the official statistics of the UAE government, in 2023, only

11.48% of the entire population of the country constitutes the Emirati population and the remaining 88.52% is the expatriate population. These expatriates are predominantly from India (27.49%), Pakistan (12.69%), Bangladesh (7.40%) and other countries like the Philippines (5.56%), Iran (4.76%), Egypt (4.23%).

As these numbers signify, the Indian and the Pakistani diasporas have the largest communities in the UAE. As a result, they exert a significant influence on the country's sociocultural fabric and economic landscape. Over 3 million Indians are estimated to live in the Emirates. They have significantly contributed to the economic structure of the UAE, resulting in strengthened economic ties between India and the UAE. A range of jobs, from skilled professional jobs in IT, finance and healthcare, to blue-collared jobs like construction work, electrical work and plumbing are all dominated by Indians. This dominance also extends to the integration of Indian culture, festivals, cuisine and art into the sociocultural fabric of the UAE.

As with India, the Pakistani diaspora also holds a prominent position in the multicultural society of the UAE. Pakistan and the UAE share a close cultural affinity, which makes UAE a lucrative choice for Pakistani individuals seeking better job opportunities and improved living standards. Over the years, the Pakistani diaspora has contributed immensely, across a wide array of sectors, including hospitality, medical, trade and manufacturing. They have also managed to establish a strong cultural identity in the UAE. Compared to the Indian diaspora, the Pakistani diaspora has more cultural and religious similarities with the UAE,

As people from countries like India and Pakistan continue to make the UAE their second home, the host country continues to evolve as a dynamic melting pot for expatriates from all over the world. Inclusive UAE policies, and a diverse array of social and cultural events, have helped foster an atmosphere of integration and acceptance, enabling

individuals from different communities to preserve their traditions while embracing the local way of life.

The air of multiculturalism in the UAE makes it easier for the Indian and Pakistani diaspora (amongst others) to acclimatise to the new country. However, for the diaspora population, the preservation of their cultural identity becomes a paramount concern. They continue to carry a rich bundle of historical, familial and cultural memories from their countries of origin which continues to shape their sense of self and belonging in the UAE. These memories, of ancestral traditions, customs, food, languages, festivals and people help them preserve and celebrate their unique identities while fostering a strong sense of community cohesion. For identity formation in the diaspora population, the impact of such memories is a multifaceted concept.

Specifically for Indians in the UAE, memories of Indian heritage, diverse culinary culture, colourful art, literature and Bollywood films evoke a sense of nostalgia and pride that reinforces their distinct cultural identity. These memories are often also an intergenerational connecting thread. It allows them to cherish and share Indian values and traditions while also adapting to the multicultural and cosmopolitan environment of the UAE.

Similarly, for the Pakistani diaspora, memories are intertwined with a deep connection to their country's rich history, literature and arts that play a crucial role in shaping their identity. Their shared experiences and nostalgia help form a bond that fosters a strong sense of unity among the community members. This bond and sense of unity is also a ground for collective strength that aids in overcoming challenges and adapting to life in a foreign country.

Alongside memories of the homeland, the memories of migration and the challenge of building a life in the UAE also contribute to the identity of both diasporas. The struggles that they face often bring forth a sense of resilience and devotion to maintain their cultural heritage in the rapidly evolving globalised nature of the culture of UAE.

An additional thread of memories that can lead to complex intersections of emotions between the Indian and the Pakistani diaspora are the memories of historical events and political dynamics between India and Pakistan. Both these now-independent countries were once a part of one single nation. The religion-based partition of British India in 1947 resulted in the birthing of two independent countries, India- a Hindu-majority state, and Pakistan- a Muslim majority state. This monumental event was etched in mass violence and displacement and resulted in the uprooting of millions and the claiming of countless lives. Even after the partition, both countries have engaged in multiple wars, skirmishes, religious-based riots and political disagreements and distrust. This historical baggage, along with the memories of partition and grievances between the two countries, can often be intense and could adversely affect the perception and interaction of the diaspora population of both countries. The historical tension has often led to divided loyalties amongst the diaspora communities. At the individual level, some might harbour intense nationalistic sentiments that can create mistrust and segregation between the Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities in the UAE. This segregation can limit cross-cultural interactions and can alter the socio-cultural fabric of the UAE. The conflicted history acts as an origination point for smaller conflicts and differences between the two diasporic communities in the UAE. Such differences include cultural and religious differences, sports rivalries, political differences and economic and business rivalries. Although temporary, such differences can be a source of tension and misunderstandings.

To conclude, memories play a significant role in shaping the identity of the diaspora population in the UAE. This helps them create a sense of unity and belonging, preserving their cultural heritage, navigating challenges, and forging connections with each other. These memories create a sense of unity and belongingness, not just within the UAE but also with each other, contributing to the vibrant and diverse fabric of the UAE's multicultural society.

Theoretical Framework

"I am the shore I left behind as well as the home I return to every evening. The voyage cannot proceed without me."

- Luisa A. Igloria

Within the context of exploring and elucidating the intricate interplay between memory and identity within the diaspora communities, several theoretical frameworks can be applied. Some of the popular theoretical frameworks such as *Self Memory System*, *Narrative Identity theory*, and *Social Identity Theory* are discussed below.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was developed in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. This theoretical framework seeks to understand how self-concepts and social behaviour are influenced by membership in social groups. At the same time, it explains the influence of memory on the way individuals recall and interpret their experiences within different social contexts, which in turn shape their social identities. Individuals, especially in the case of the diasporic populations, define themselves based on the social groups they belong to and the group memberships alter their behaviours, attitudes and perceptions towards themselves and the society. Both Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE have established strong social identities. They have fostered a sense of cultural pride through language schools, religious institutions, and vibrant community centres. These spaces allow individuals to connect with their heritage, celebrate traditions, and build social networks. The social groups formed can be a source of empowerment and resilience, particularly in a foreign environment.

These social groups are categorised based on similarities, such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, age and other such constructs. This social categorisation takes place naturally and forms an important part of one's self-identity. Within the Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities in the UAE, this categoriation can be multifaceted. Individuals might

belong to various groups simultaneously, such as their country of origin, cultural associations, or religious communities. According to SIT, each membership uniquely contributes to the social identity of the individual.

SIT also emphasises the difference between in-groups and out-groups. As the names suggest, in-groups are the groups which individuals belong to and out-groups are groups that individuals do not belong to. Individuals perceive their in-group more positively and naturally develop a sense of loyalty and favouritism towards it, while exhibiting discrimination and prejudice towards the out-groups. By extension, this helps individuals enhance their own self-esteem and maintain a positive social identity. In the case of the diaspora population, strong prejudices and biases against out-groups might also lead to individuals engaging in behaviours that benefit their group. In the quest to differentiate their group positively from other groups, individuals might indulge in conflicting behaviour as well. When it comes to large diasporic communities, as is the case with the Indian and Pakistani diasporic communities in the UAE, they might consider members of the host country as out-group members.

In some cases, an individual's adherence to their social identity of the group is so high that they lose their sense of individual identity, also known as 'depersonalisation'. Depersonalisation further contributes to intergroup conflict and conformity with group norms. However, SIT proposes that individuals often seek a balance between the need to belong to a social group and the need to maintain a distinct personal identity. This balance is imperative for maintaining positive self-esteem and social cohesion.

In the context of SIT, memory is not just an occasional and objective recollection of past events. Instead, memory is understood as a socially constructed process that is shaped by the collective narratives and experiences of the groups to which people belong. Memories are often influenced by stories, shared histories, traditions and the social contexts in which they occur. Group interactions can also influence the way

people remember and interpret events and that can reinforce narratives. In the case of diaspora communities, memories, identity, and belongingness are especially intertwined. Historical events, shared memories of cultural practices and migration experiences can often reinforce people's sense of belongingness and their connection to their ancestral roots. For example, memories of triumphs, and moments of resilience in the face of struggles, can foster a strong collective identity and a sense of unity within the diaspora population.

For the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE, memories and interpretation of historical events play an essential role in the identity formation of individuals. The group conflict between them reflects the complex historical and political relationship between the two countries, as well as the diasporas of both countries, present in the UAE. The national identities of India and Pakistan, often intertwined with historical baggage and political rivalry, add another layer of complexity. Despite shared cultural and linguistic roots, national narratives can shape perceptions and create an "us vs. them" mentality. These group conflicts can become especially aggravated during the events of national or cultural pride or sports rivalries (e.g., cricket). High-stake cricket matches between the two countries can lead to competitive sentiments and passionate discussions. However, it is important to recognize that national identity is not monolithic, and individuals within each community may hold nuanced views and varying degrees of attachment to their home country.

Although there are examples of conflicts between Indians and Pakistanis in the UAE, they often co-exist peacefully and have respectful interactions. The credit for this peaceful co-existence also goes to the UAE government which promotes harmony among its diverse expatriate population. However, the UAE's unique demographics, with a majority expatriate population, present both challenges and opportunities for social integration. The government's multicultural policies and emphasis on tolerance create a relatively open environment for diverse communities to

coexist. But, navigating social hierarchies and power dynamics within the broader society can be a complex task for members of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora.

Self-Memory System (SMS) is another theoretical framework that attempts to understand the complex interplay between memory and identity. It was developed by cognitive psychologists Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, C. Davis, and J. Larson (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Through this framework, they focused on understanding the contribution of autobiographical memories to the formation and maintenance of the concept of self.

The SMS proposes that people construct and maintain their self-concept through the organisation and retrieval of autobiographical memories. Alternatively, we can say that memory is viewed as a database of the self. In the context of the diaspora population, an extra layer of the context of living away from the country of origin gets added to autobiographical memories. The diaspora population often struggles to maintain a balance between cultural adaptation of the host country and maintaining ties to their roots in their home country, and this balance in turn affects the formation of their hyphenated identity. For the Indian and Pakistani diaspora, autonoetic consciousness plays a crucial role in negotiating the complexities of living between two cultures. Most individuals have developed a more fluid and complex sense of self, incorporating elements of both their heritage and adopted home.

Autobiographical memories are an individual's memories of specific events that they have experienced. These memories are often associated with significant life events, emotions, and contexts. According to the SMS, such memories are extremely important in forming and updating the self-concept. In the case of the members of the diaspora population, memories of traditions, significant cultural experiences and customs from their country of origin contribute greatly to their cultural identity. Cultural identity helps to maintain a connection to one's home ground, which

is an important part of the concept of self. For example, strong event memories of cultural celebrations, weddings, and religious festivals solidify the sense of belonging and shared identity within the diaspora. These memories contribute to the transmission of traditions across generations.

Self-concept, according to the SMS, is an ever-changing and dynamic construct. This construct is highly influenced by the activation and retrieval of relevant autobiographical memories. For the Indian and Pakistani diaspora populations, autobiographical memory plays an important role in cultural adaptation as well. As people interact with individuals from new cultural backgrounds and go through new experiences, they create new memories that shape their cultural identity and eventually affect their ever-evolving concept of self. Autobiographical memories also influence people's perception of themselves in the diasporic setting. Memories of experiences shared with other members of the diaspora population can help form a sense of belonging and solidarity with the community and can contribute to shared diasporic identity. Similarly, nostalgic memories can evoke strong emotional responses among diasporic individuals. The self-concept is also influenced by nostalgic memories, leading to a stronger attachment to the cultural identity and a desire to preserve and celebrate heritage. Self-memories can also influence how individuals interact with their social groups. For example, Individuals with strong positive memories of their cultural heritage may be more likely to actively participate in community events and contribute to the preservation of traditions.

Another aspect of autobiographical memory defined by SMS is the reflective self-appraisal nature of the memory. People tend to incorporate feedback and evaluation from others into their concept of self. When memories involve interaction and feedback from loved ones, they play a role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves based on external evaluation. The sense of agency fostered by the SMS can motivate members of the said diaspora to strive for success and contribute positively to their communities and

the UAE society. Memories of overcoming challenges also help bolster resilience and adaptability. The SMS also points out the importance of maintaining a sense of continuity in the concept of self, over time. The autobiographical memories help create a narrative that connects past experiences to the present, contributing to a stable and continuous sense of self. Additionally, memories related to historical narratives of migration and resilience can provide a sense of continuity and meaning in the face of displacement. Understanding the collective journey can empower individuals to navigate any other challenges faced by them.

SMS is an excellent framework that provides great insights into the complex relationship between memory and identity. Especially in the context of the population diaspora, it offers a nuanced understanding of the interaction of autobiographical memories and cultural identity. Personhood narratives, shaped by both individual experiences and broader cultural narratives, are continuously crafted and re-crafted within the diaspora. These narratives, in turn, influence how individuals view themselves and their place in the host country and the world.

Narrative identity theory (NIT) is another theoretical framework that attempts to understand identity formation in relation to memories. This theory focuses on the construction of a sense of self and identity through the formation and interpretation of personal narratives and life stories. NIT is a psychological framework that was developed by Dan P. McAdams and has taken inspiration from the works of psychologists like Eric Erikson (McAdams, AdlerJ, 2010). Similar to SMS, this theory also suggests that our identities are dynamic and ever-evolving narratives.

For NIT, the stories that we tell about ourselves are of the utmost importance. These personal stories help us form a coherent narrative of our experiences, relationships and life events. This narrative further helps shape self-perception and identity. Furthermore, a coherent connection has been established between narrative formation, personal

stories and memory, through various studies in the field of psychology and neuroscience. For example, Bartlett, in their study, suggested that memory is not a passive process but a collection of narratives of our personal experiences and cultural expectations (Bartlett, 1932). In this context, for Indian, Pakistani and diaspora populations from other countries, the UAE acts as a diverse, multicultural ground where they get a chance to explore and construct a narrative that drives their hyphenated identity. The construction of this narrative identity is influenced by societal, interpersonal and cultural factors. Many members of the diaspora share stories of leaving their home countries, often driven by economic aspirations or political turmoil. These narratives highlight sacrifice, resilience, and hope, shaping their understanding of themselves as individuals who have overcome challenges and built new lives.

An important element of NIT is the idea of agency and authorship. It suggests that we are the protagonist in our story, and we choose the events and experiences that shape our narratives. We have full control over the interpretation and meaning of these experiences. A good example in the case of a diaspora population might be the professional and economic narratives formed by individuals who migrate for economic opportunities. Their narratives might highlight the pursuit of financial stability, upward mobility and better job opportunities.

Narrative identity theory emphasizes the importance of individuals having agency in constructing their own stories. The diaspora can utilize storytelling platforms, community projects, and artistic expressions to reclaim their narratives and assert their place within the UAE's social fabric.When we hold the agency of our memories and narratives, our identities become more coherent. A more logically developed narrative helps individuals make sense of their past, present and future, leading to a deeper understanding of self. For the diaspora population, these narratives also have stories of migration, cultural heritage, family ties, and aspirations for a better life integrated into them. A unified narrative

for the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE serves as an anchor to their cultural roots and helps develop a sense of belongingness within them. The Indian and Pakistani diasporas often maintain ties with their home countries and act as bridge-builders between the UAE and their countries of origin. Even in the UAE, both Indians and Pakistanis form very tight-knit communities, providing a strong support system. These communities contribute to the construction of narratives that emphasise shared experiences, common values, and a sense of belonging. Having said that, they also take up the challenge to adapt to the new cultural context. Their narratives also reflect their experiences of navigating cultural differences, stereotypes, and potential instances of discrimination. The challenges they face shape their narratives of resilience, cultural pride, and a desire to challenge misconceptions. Additionally, stories of professional achievements and entrepreneurial ventures within the UAE are common within both communities. These narratives not only celebrate individual accomplishments but also contribute to a collective sense of pride and empowerment, showcasing the diaspora's contributions to the UAE's economic and social development.

The NIT explains that people indulge in redemptive narratives to find meaning and growth from challenges and negative experiences. However, Individuals may face internal conflict when reconciling narratives of their home countries with their experiences in the UAE. This can lead to a sense of identity confusion or the need to develop compartmentalized narratives for different contexts. Stereotypes or negative narratives about Indians and Pakistanis in the UAE can challenge their self-perceptions and sense of belonging. In this case, counternarratives that highlight positive contributions and resilience become crucial in combating prejudice and promoting positive identity construction. This redemptive narrative offers an opportunity for personal development, positive change and resilience even in the face of difficulties.

Historical Context of Indian and Pakistani Diasporas in the UAE

"Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools."

- Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism

Indian and Pakistani diaspora populations have a strong historical background in the UAE. Their presence in the country is closely tied to the economic development and labour needs of the UAE, starting particularly from the latter half of the 20th century.

India has always had connections with the Gulf countries because of trade practices and maritime activities. However, the most significant movement of Indian labour to the UAE started in the 20th century. One important historical event that marks this movement is the discovery of oil in the UAE. Following this discovery in the 1950s, there was an oil boom leading to rapid economic growth and infrastructure development. In the UAE, this sudden and fast-paced development created a demand for different types of labour, ranging from construction workers to professionals. Indians from different regions and backgrounds started to flock to the UAE in search of better employment opportunities. Although this migration was initially temporary, over time the pattern expanded and people from all sorts of career backgrounds started to move to the UAE. From construction workers and transportation service workers to doctors, engineers and information technology specialists, everyone wanted the best of everything that the UAE had to offer.

Similarly, Pakistani migrants also began to move to the UAE during the oil boom era. The demand for labour was growing so rapidly in the UAE that not just Indians and Pakistanis, but people from all over the world, were moving to the country. Just like the Indian migrants, Pakistanis from various backgrounds started to enter the UAE. From labourers, drivers, domestic helpers and support staff to an

educated workforce including engineers, doctors and other professionals, these migrants started to contribute to the UAE's development. Along with the contribution towards the UAE's economic development, these migrants also have been sending remittances[20] back to their home countries. These remittances became an important source of foreign exchange for both India and Pakistan.

While the involvement of the Indian and Pakistani diasporas has significantly impacted the economic structure of the UAE, the cultural landscape of the country has also been highly influenced by the diaspora population from India and Pakistan.

The unique environment of the UAE has given the Indian and Pakistani diasporas an open stage to develop distinct identities inspired by various social, cultural and historical factors. The primary factor that ties the entire system together is *economic opportunities*. Historically, the main reason for Indians and Pakistanis to migrate to the UAE has been the need to seek better economic conditions and better employment options. This shared experience of seeking employment and sending remittances home fosters a sense of solidarity and identity among the diaspora population. Moreover, the economic success achieved by many individuals from the diaspora community has led to a positive image of the UAE.

Another such factor is the *cosmopolitan outlook* adopted by the UAE. The Indian and Pakistani diaspora community is exposed to a number of cultures from around the world. This leads to a more integrated community where individuals have the ability to adapt to diverse surroundings. Such an environment also results in cross-cultural learning and exchanges, shaping a unique mixture of identities. Due to their cosmopolitan outlook, the UAE is very tolerant and *accepting towards various religious and social practices*. The presence of religious institutions like mosques and temples has played

20 When migrants send home part of their earnings in the form of either cash or goods to support their families, these transfers are known as workers' or migrant remittances.

an important role in creating a sense of community and preserving different cultural and religious practices. Indian and Pakistani festivals like Diwali, Eid and Independence Day for both countries are also celebrated in the UAE. These celebrations provide a platform for the diaspora population to come together and strengthen their hyphenated identity. In addition, the Indian and Pakistani diasporas have been able to establish a social organisation that further reinforces their sense of identity by providing them with support and networking opportunities.

Cultural integration has also impacted *language and education systems* in the UAE. Acceptance of languages like Urdu is an important cultural anchor for all Pakistani and Indian diaspora populations. Many successful individuals from this section have invested in the education of themselves and their children. This helps preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage while also adapting to the local education system.

With the growth of the diaspora population in the UAE, there is an entirely new generation born in the country with a hyphenated identity. This younger generation often has limited exposure to their homeland's culture and is more likely to be acculturated to their local customs and norms. However, they also experience the sense of being different from others due to the difference in their heritage and cultural roots.

Both the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE have managed to develop a strong and significant presence in their host country. Their hyphenated identities have also evolved, especially in response to the multicultural and cosmopolitan setting of the UAE. The shared experiences of Indians and Pakistanis, their economic contributions and their cultural connections have led to the development of diverse but robust communities that continuously shape the social structure of the UAE.

Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities in the UAE have a rich history of migration and the cultural heritage of their home countries is deeply intertwined with their sense of belonging and identity. The memories of these historical

events play an important role in preserving the individual's cultural roots, even in a foreign land.

Historical memories of their respective homeland act as a bridge between the past and the present, which helps individuals in the diaspora maintain a strong connection with their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This connection is vital for preserving traditions, languages, customs, and values that might otherwise fade away over time. These memories also serve as a repository of collective knowledge about traditions, rituals, festivals, and practices. It allows older generations to pass down these traditions to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural practices that define their heritage.

The memories of the challenges faced and their historical journey help the diaspora population to develop a stronger sense of belonging. Historical memories help to create a common narrative that holds the diaspora community together. This feeling of connection to this shared narrative helps foster a sense of solidarity and unity within the diaspora community. By reflecting on their struggles and achievements from the past, people belonging to the same community can find common ground and build supportive networks.

Historical memories and language also share a special relationship. Memories play a significant role in passing down and maintaining languages that might decline in usage as the second-generation diaspora merges into the local culture of the UAE. Preserving the native language is imperative, as it is a carrier of cultural knowledge and therefore helps us preserve our cultural roots. These memories and the association with the native language also influence the continuation of cultural celebrations, such as religious festivals and cultural events. The celebrations provide the diaspora communities with a chance to come together and reinforce their shared identity. They also offer a relatively fun platform to raise awareness among younger generations about their ancestors' experiences, struggles and achievements. This in turn helps shape a more comprehensive understanding of their heritage, fostering a sense of pride and appreciation.

Historical memories also inspire artistic expression in the form of literature, music, dance and visual arts. Diaspora artists from India and Pakistan may produce art inspired by their historical background to create meaningful and impactful work that reflects their cultural roots. Most historical memories are an amalgamation of stories of resilience, determination and perseverance. Sharing these stories helps to develop significant values and ethics across generations, encouraging people to uphold their ancestral principles.

As discussed above, historical memories are an important tool for preserving cultural roots. However, it also helps make the process of adaptation and integration easier. It acts as a safety net for the diaspora communities while they try to blend their cultural heritage with the host country's culture, creating a new fusion that enriches both sides. It enables the transmission of traditions, strengthens the sense of belonging, fosters community cohesion, and serves as a foundation for the continued celebration and preservation of their rich cultural heritage.

Challenges and Opportunities in Diaspora Identity Formation

"Who am I but someone others define? It's easier to be a stereotype. It hurts when you are yourself."

- Trang Thanh Tran, She Is a Haunting

The UAE is not only home to the largest Indian and Pakistani diasporas but is also considered one of the best host countries. Additionally, both Indians and Pakistanis contribute significantly to the country's economy and society. However, the Indian and Pakistani diasporas often face unique challenges, especially those related to dual identities and cultural integration. They struggle to maintain a balance between their original cultural identity and the need to integrate into the local Emirati culture.

Individuals in the Indian and Pakistani diasporas may feel torn between their roots and their desire to embrace the Emirati culture. They often struggle to maintain a balance between upholding the cultural elements of their homeland and adapting to the ones from the host land. One of the most significant barriers to this integration can be language. Usually, the South Asian community in the UAE speaks English, however, maintaining their native languages (Hindi, Urdu, etc.) and learning Arabic for better interaction with the local population can be difficult for them. Language can act as a barrier for the Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities while building connections with locals and other expatriate communities. Additionally, the distinct social norms and cultural practices in the UAE may differ from what Indians and Pakistanis are accustomed to in their home countries.

Along with sociocultural integration, workplace integration can also be challenging for the diaspora population. Working with different management styles and getting adjusted to different communication norms and expectations can foster a sense of isolation for some people. Most individuals from the Indian and Pakistani communities have strong associations with their religious identities. Therefore, practising their faith while respecting local customs can be complicated. This complication is also translated to celebrations of festivals and other national events.

Initial juggling between the connections with the home and the host countries can be emotionally demanding as well. During this transition period, family ties, community events and traditions become even more crucial for providing support. Like other diaspora communities, the Indian and Pakistani communities also face stereotypes and biases based on their nationality. This in turn can affect their sense of belonging and can cause a range of unique challenges. The best way to overcome these challenges is an open and inclusive approach from both the UAE's society and the Indian and Pakistani communities. Promoting awareness of cultural differences, providing resources for language learning and encouraging intercultural exchange can help build a more integrated and

harmonious environment for the diaspora. Creating safe spaces where individuals can embrace their cultural identity while connecting with the local culture is important for an enriching and fruitful experience for everyone involved.

The Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE often adopt various coping mechanisms to preserve their cultural memory and identity while living in a foreign country. These strategies help them maintain a connection to their roots, pass down traditions to future generations, and create a sense of belonging within the multicultural context of the UAE.

One such important coping mechanism is establishing cultural and religious organisations. These organisations create a sense of community, make organising cultural events and celebrating local festivals easier, and help offer support to newcomers. Such organisations also help those individuals who want to prioritise maintaining their native languages, at least within their families and communities. This includes speaking their mother tongue at home, offering language classes for children, and organising language-focused events.

Another significant way to preserve cultural memories is by celebrating traditional festivals and cultural events. For example, Diwali, Eid, Holi, and other festivals are celebrated with enthusiasm, allowing individuals to connect with their heritage. Additionally, food is also a powerful cultural connector. Individuals often continue preparing traditional dishes, hosting food-related events, and frequenting restaurants that offer authentic cuisine from their home countries. For many in the Indian and Pakistani diasporsa, practising their religion is essential. This may involve attending religious institutions, observing rituals, and participating in community prayers and events. Staying connected with media from their home countries helps preserve cultural identity. Watching movies, and television shows and reading newspapers in their native languages can provide comfort and familiarity.

As a way to pass down cultural knowledge to the next generation, parents of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora

population educate their children about their heritage, including customs, values and history. Some parents even try to make regular trips back to their countries of origin to reconnect with family, friends, and their cultural roots. These visits can be essential for building a grounded sense of identity.

Maintaining a strong connection with their traditional arts, crafts and culture can help individuals build coping mechanisms that allow them to navigate the challenges of living in a different cultural context while preserving their cultural memory, identity and sense of belonging.

It is important to foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the Indian, Pakistani and other diaspora communities in the UAE as it builds a supportive and vibrant environment. One of the best ways to do this is by organising cultural festivals, celebrations, and events that bring together people from different backgrounds. Encouraging collaboration between various community organisations can also help magnify the diversity of traditions, languages, and customs. Also, collaboration with local Emirati organisations might provide an opportunity for the Indian and Pakistani diasporas to share their culture while learning about the culture of the host country. Similarly, offering language classes for both children and adults will help in language retention and encourage communication within the community. Arabic language classes can be added to facilitate interaction with the local population.

The government, along with the various communities, can establish support groups within the community. The focus of these support groups will be topics such as career development, mental health, parenting, and integration. These support groups can also act as a safe space for people to connect with each other and seek assistance. Communities can also take smaller but impactful steps like engaging the younger generation by creating youth clubs, sports teams, and cultural activities and letting them take leadership roles in organising events, in turn helping the said generation to connect with their heritage while contributing to the

community at the same time. They can host workshops that encourage dialogue, dispel stereotypes and celebrate the contributions of the diaspora population to raise awareness about Indian and Pakistani culture. Additionally, collaborating with other expatriate communities to organise multicultural events can promote inclusivity and also help in building strong relationships with different groups. Encouraging community members to participate in volunteer activities, both within the diaspora community and in the broader UAE society, can help foster a sense of purpose and build connections. Lastly, showcasing Indian and Pakistani art, music, dance and theatre through performances and exhibitions can provide a platform for artists within the community and promote cultural exchange.

Conclusion

In the UAE, the Indian and Pakistani diasporas have taken the shape of dynamic and multifaceted communities. They are influenced by a variety of factors, with memory and identity playing pivotal roles in their experiences. Both memory and identity highly influence the diasporic population's sense of belonging, cultural preservation and their role in Emirate society. The Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE find solace in their memories, as they serve as a profound bond to their respective homelands. These cherished recollections encapsulate their rich cultural heritage, age-old traditions, diverse languages and historical narratives. This memory not only fosters a deep connection but also ensures an unbroken lineage, enabling them to retain a strong sense of self even when distanced from their native lands. It is through shared memories that they establish a sense of community, helping them cope with the challenges of being in a foreign land.

Maintaining cultural identity is crucial for both the Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE. These communities consist of individuals hailing from various backgrounds, encompassing a multitude of languages, religions and regional customs. Despite this rich diversity,

members of these diasporas make dedicated efforts to preserve their unique cultural heritage. Celebrations, culinary delights, music and religious rituals all serve as significant pillars that uphold their sense of identity. The various forms of cultural representation not only offer a feeling of familiarity and solace but also serve as conduits to establish connections among individuals and the broader society in the UAE. The notion of identity for those belonging to the Indian and Pakistani diasporas residing in the UAE is multifaceted. They find themselves navigating between their original cultural backgrounds and the need to assimilate into the cosmopolitan ambience prevalent in the UAE. Although they retain deep-rooted affinities with their origins, they also make substantial contributions towards advancing both the UAE's growth and its economy. This hyphenated identity highlights the resilience and adaptability of the diaspora as they negotiate their sense of self in a multicultural context.

The importance of memory and individuality stretches far beyond one's personal encounters, reaching into the intricate social tapestry of the United Arab Emirates. Within this vibrant nation, a thriving community of Indians and Pakistanis contributes to its cultural richness, nurturing a climate of intercultural comprehension and shared admiration. Acting as intermediaries between the UAE and their countries of origin, these diasporas play a pivotal role in bolstering economic exchanges, tourism opportunities and diplomatic relations. Undoubtedly, for those belonging to the Indian and Pakistani diasporas residing in the UAE, memory and identity bear immense significance. The presence of these factors acts as a wellspring of resilience, enabling individuals to overcome the obstacles that come with living in an unfamiliar country, while preserving a profound bond with their cultural roots. As the expatriate community flourishes and makes valuable contributions to the progress of the UAE, their distinct amalgamation of recollection and sense of self will persist as an essential component within the nation's diverse fabric.

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Chapter 11

The Price of Care: Sociality and Intermediary Networks of Kerala Migrant Care Workers in Israel

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Abstract

This study contextualises the intricate dynamics between intermediate networks and societal ties among migrant care workers from Kerala in Israel. The study sheds light on the larger concerns within the global care economy and emphasises the need for just changes to protect migrant workers' rights and wellbeing by exposing a complex interaction of power, belonging and exploitation. In spite of regulations, illegal placement fees persist, due to a variety of complex reasons, including government complicity and lack of a bilateral agreement between India and Israel. International social networks are crucial in offering support, a sense of belonging, the circulation of information, and addressing mental health among migrant care workers. Additionally, these networks impart legitimacy to hiring procedures, thus shaping the power dynamics and obfuscating the distinction between ethical and exploitative behaviour. Malayali migrant care workers utilise community-building activities and weekend get-togethers as spaces to negotiate their cultural freedom and practise and recreate a sense of belonging in foreign lands.

The global care workforce, inclusive of care and non-care workers and domestic workers in care and non-care sectors, amounts to 381 million workers, incorporating almost 11.5%

of the total global employment (ILO, 2019). Reports suggest that the growth of nuclear families and single-headed households, changes in demographic patterns, growth of women's employment and socioeconomic and environmental transformations contribute to the increased demand for care workers in what is called a "care deficit", especially in high-income countries. Worldwide in 2015, 2.1 billion individuals, including children, infants and the elderly, were in need of care, and this number is expected to rise to 2.3 billion by 2030 (ILO, 2018). Ideally, the gap in the labour market in meeting these demands could be bridged by doubling the investments in education, health and social work sectors to create additional jobs.[21] However, labour migration, driven by income differentials and working conditions, has been an overriding feature of the global healthcare labour market. In high income and OECD countries, the healthcare workforce constitutes almost 10 to 15 per cent of total employment (OECD, 2019; Addati, 2019). They unintentionally become part and parcel of the global care chains, wherein a network of care relations is established amongst intermediary relations constituted by left-behind families and the new communities and families that the migrants provide care for.

The construction of these global care networks and spaces is highly dynamic and gendered. At least 65% of the workforce in the global care sector are women, most of whom are concentrated in the Americas, Europe and Central Asia (*Women at Work in G20 Countries: Progress and Policy Action*, 2019). Much of the literature focusing on paid and unpaid care work from these regions illustrates how certain conditions of employment in these settings, such as the relationality factor of care work, could weaken the bargaining positions of care workers, often leading to low wages, working overtime, lower

21 Radical approach to taxation has been advocated as a way forward in funding the large-scale healthcare needs in the care economy in high income countries. This includes recommendations for a more progressive and transparent tax structure, taxing the wealthy more than consumption or work, making care occupation tax-free and recognising care expenses as tax deductions (Elson, 2017).

social security benefits, deteriorating working and living conditions, and even a "care pay penalty"[22] of 4 to 40 percent (ILO, 2018; Hasson & Dagan Buzaglo, 2019; Yaron, 2016). Even within formal care settings, working conditions and pay levels highly depend on the coverage and quality of care services in the receiving country and the compensatory role played by domestic work in the absence of care in the sending country (ILO, 2013).

The care economy is one of the primary sectors where feminisation of the workforce has been the rule, although with regional, sectoral and occupational variations (Shannon et al., 2019). While female participation in the care workforce ranges from 79 percent to 93 percent in Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, male and female workforce participation is almost evenly divided in African and Arab states (ILO, 2018). Feminist economists with a socialist underpinning strongly advocate for the need to steer away from market-based, exploitative and volunteer modes of care work, and instead ideate towards a state-regulated or overseen care sector with quality professional care and fair wages (Connelly et al., 2018; Müller, 2019)

In the specific case of Israel, since the 1990s, the care deficit has been widening for a range of reasons, including changes in demography and higher life expectancy rates thanks to biomedical innovations (Hasson & Dagan Buzaglo,

22 Care pay penalty is the gap in hourly wages that is not connected to differences in skills, experience, qualifications or credentials; it varies from country to country, rendering care workers extremely poorly paid. For instance, in the United States, the penalty could amount to 14.2 percent for female and 10.6 percent for male care workers. Other countries where there is higher pay penalty for female care workers include Mexico, France, Hungary and Canada. Although the pay penalty affects both men and women, it is more pronounced among women care workers. In contrast, countries like Sweden and Germany have care premiums for women amounting to between 9 and 12 percent of their hourly wages. Some of the reasons for the pay penalty include the lack of recognition for unpaid care work and the undervaluation of paid care work.

2019). In effect, there has been an exodus of international labour to the country to make up much of its care, domestic, agriculture and construction sectors, particularly from transnational labour exporting hubs in South and Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Within South Asia, most of the migrant labourers to Israel hail from mainly three countries, namely, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (ILO, 2021). Given that the Indian diaspora and export of labour has far-reaching effects on local and global political economies (Gevorkyan, 2022), the intimate spaces of care work offer interesting and imaginative landscapes for analysis. This paper is an attempt to answer the hard-hitting questions of how intermediary networks involving participants in the care economy shape, evolve or resist the transnational landscape of care work connecting India and Israel. Over the course of two months, the researcher spoke to fifteen migrants from Kerala who are currently working in Israel, via digital communication platforms, to understand the various facets of temporary overseas migration and intermediary networks they deal with.

Israel as a Labour-Importing Country

Since the 1990s, there has been a striking escalation in the number of migrant workers seeking employment in Israel (Bartram, 1998; Shamir, 2013). The formalised care sector is the single largest employment generator for transnational labour in Israel, followed by the agricultural sector and now increasingly by the construction sector (PIBA, 2023). Israel's opening up to the import of labour is as much a social issue as it is a political endeavour. Construction jobs that were earlier filled by Palestinian workers are now being taken up by migrant labourers from South and Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe in what is seen as Israel's efforts to minimise labour market access to Palestinians (Fatima, 2023; Petersburg, 2023).

Right from the time Israel opened up its labour market to overseas workers, the process was privatised and contracted by private brokering agencies (Lebovitch & Friedman, 2013).

Although the exploitative nature of the practice and its future consequences have been flagged by NGOs and CSOs working on migrant labour rights in the country, there are tremendous gaps in the justice and legal systems in enforcing the law and battling unfair practices. Litigation and advocacy efforts have led to bilateral agreements with Bulgaria, Romania and Thailand regarding the agricultural and construction sectors, yet the large numbers of migrant workers in the care sector reinforces the need to widen the scope of these agreements (Raijman & Kushnirovich, 2019). Nevertheless, new industries, including the hotel and institutional nursing sectors, are also being brought under such agreements, which were traditionally not accessible to migrant workers (PIBA, 2023). This could be taken as a sign of the government warming to the idea of overseeing overseas labour imports; however, with the current scope and depth of the issue in the care sector there is an urgent need to extend such institutional cover to the migrant care workforce as well (Raijman, 2020). This is, perhaps, symptomatic of the fact that careworkers in Israel, as in many other Western countries, endure the double disadvantage of being marginalised in the labour market, and caring for those who are marginal to public discourse and lack consumer power.

For instance, the national expenditure on long-term care in Israel is 1.4% of the GDP, which is similar to that of other OECD countries. However, the non-universal coverage and high expenditure points to the issue of low efficiency levels for long-term care in the country (Chernichovsky et al., 2017). This essentially translates to low long-term care benefits, limited services, dependence of formal care systems on low-paid and untrained migrant care workers, and, more often than not, collusion between care agencies and government departments to cover up the economic extortion from, and poor working conditions of, migrant care workers. All of this contributes to an ongoing shortage in quality long-term care in the country (Hasson & Dagan Buzaglo, 2019).

The National Long-Term Care Program, amended in early 2018 by the Israeli government, expands the guidelines

for elderly care and outsourcing of care to overseas temporary labourers. It endeavours to expand public spending and increase the amount of benefit and allocation of resources for services to further ease the economic and care burden on households (Bank of Israel, 2018). Although the policy acknowledges the challenges faced by caregivers, including lack of privacy and caring for employers with mental illnesses, there is no specific policy mechanism proposed to address these issues, which also include poor pay and working conditions.

To put things in perspective, it is important to consider the enormity of the care economy in Israel as the largest employer for both legal and illegal[23] migrant labourers. By the end of 2022, the total number of foreign workers staying in Israel was a record 136,056, of which 18.5% were staying and working illegally. More than half of the total 110,890 legal migrant workers were employed in the care sector[24]. It is also the highest employer of women migrants in the country. After Filipinos, who constitute almost a third of all migrant care workers, Indians are the second highest migrant community, working through legal and illegal means in the formalised care economy of Israel (PIBA, 2023).

With bilateral agreements in place, there is an increasing proportion of overseas labour reaching Israel through government-facilitated processes every year. In 2022, of all the legal foreign workers in Israel, 47% arrived as part of bilateral agreements or implementation company arrangements (PIBA, 2023; Raijman & Kushnirovich, 2019). In 2022, bilateral agreements were initiated in new areas such as the hotel and institutional nursing industries with the Philippines, Nepal and Georgia. This led to an additional 1020 foreign workers being legally employed in the nursing institution sector (PIBA, 2023).

23 13,251 out of 18,136 illegal foreign workers were also working in the care sector by the end of 2022

24 59,254 individuals out of 110,890 (53%)

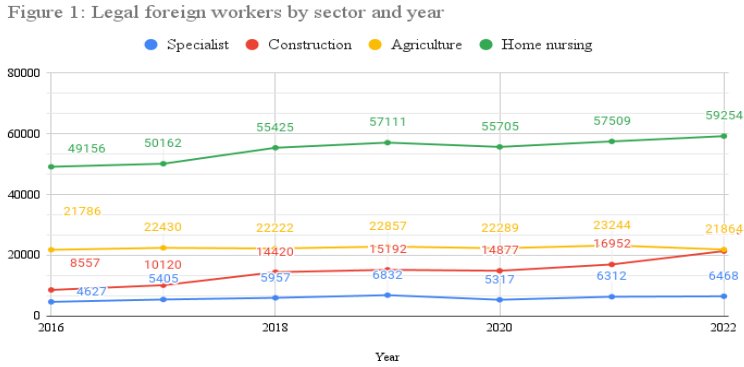

Figure 1: Legal foreign workers by sector and year. *(Source: Population and Immigration Authority, Government of Israel)*

Sourcing care workers from developing, particularly low-income, countries is critical to the survival and buttressing of social and healthcare systems and moderating the cost of living crisis in Israel (*The Jerusalem Post*, 2023; IDI, 2022).

Kerala as a Labour-Exporting State

Since the mid-2000s, the decline in labour imports from the Philippines has coincided with a steady increase from South Asian countries such as India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Lim, 2015). There are certain advantages that Indians as a labour-exporting society offer to the transnational care market. Indian care workers generally speak sufficient levels of English, are tech-savvy, and have a higher level of education (Walton-Roberts & Rajan, 2020). History is also a favourable factor, as the Indian cities of Mumbai, Kochi and Kolkata hosted several thousand Jews, especially during a time when antisemitic persecution was underway elsewhere in the world.

Specifically for the Indian state of Kerala, known for its education, health and overall human development outcomes, and being heavily dependent on remittances (Sunny et al., 20202), Israel holds a special place in the religious

consciousness of the Abrahamic communities. 18.3% of the Kerala population are Christians, comprising both protestant and catholic belief systems, who hold the sanctity of the Holy Land of Israel very close to the heart. There are migrant workers from other parts of India, but the Malayali (Keralite) community in Israel has a wide-ranging network and social capital mediated by the priest community and migrant Jews from Kochi.

Departing from the generalised and dominant narrative of commodifying domestic and care work, recent narratives, specifically situated in the Filipino community, subvert such black and white perspectives about labour migration (Liebelt, 2011). Therefore, migration studies on some of the largest migrant communities and diasporas reveal the need for a nuanced approach to understanding not just the motivations, processes and consequences of such endeavours, but also the paradoxical experiences and lived realities within the caregivers' intimate networks.

The Specific Case of Live-in Care Work

The home is a dynamic site of care work, characterised by the close proximity of caregiver and the dependent and other intermediary agents, including relatives and other domestic workers. Because of the special nature of the workspace, more often than not, migrant careworkers are isolated and unable to participate in workers' organisations and unions, especially given that they are situated in alien settings. Lack of collectivisation can adversely impact the bargaining power of care workers to demand better pay and living conditions, or grievance redressals (Rogalewski & Florek, 2020).

As care work is relational, the caregiver and dependent often enter into an emotional relationship (Kartupelis, 2020), leaving the caregiver unable to deny services in the face of inadequate working/ living conditions or pay. They also become reluctant to go on strike or leave care recipients in the absence of a replacement, which puts them in a difficult

position to claim rights, a relationship akin to kinship through deep personal connections (Liebelt, 2011).

In addition, all is not well in the highly unregulated care system in Israel, where the welfare of the careworker solely depends on the nature of the family they are allotted (Kav LaOved, 2018). There is a contradictory state of affairs within the confined spaces of these homes, wherein even while caregivers are performing extremely intimate forms of labour, they are constantly put under state surveillance, given the threat they pose as foreign nationals to the ethno-racial state building process in Israel (Brown, 2017). Consequently, terms of employment are disproportionately in favour of the employer, leaving the migrant careworker highly vulnerable in a skewed power relationship. Visa extension and stay of migrant careworkers are solely dependent on their ability to find an employer, which legally binds the caregiver to the employer in a complex set of regulations (Kav LaOved, 2023). When it comes to the legal and justice systems, the employers have the upper hand in terms of the familiarity and believability in the event of a complaint forwarded by the caregiver. Working in intimate, gendered, sexualised and highly racialised environments for live-in careworkers requires safeguards against potential physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Kav LaOved, 2019, 2022: Lebovitch, 2013: Lim, 2015).

Intermediary Networks and Dynamics: Brokers and "Modern Slavery"

Getting in touch with an employment broker is the first concrete step taken by a prospective migrant labourer to access the migrant labour market of Israel. Legally, a manpower agency is not allowed to charge more than 3,677 NIS from careworkers for visa arrangements and travel (PIBA, 2017). However, the prevalence of a placement fee and employment brokerage in Israel's overseas labour market falls somewhat in a grey area, where the state hardly intervenes. Employment brokers and care agencies are part of a multi-million-shekel

industry operating at home and abroad and imposing illegal brokers' fees on prospective candidates; dubbed "modern slavery" by the Israeli Supreme Court (Lazareva, 2023). Such networks are found to recruit care workers from countries such as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Moldova and Ukraine.

In the last decade or so, in a bid to make the processes more transparent and accessible, several legal changes have been introduced to regulate the system. However, the heavy extortion of Indian careworkers continues unabated, with brokers' fees ranging anywhere from $5,000 to $25,000, mainly for two reasons: a) the absence of a bilateral agreement between India and Israel; and b) the conniving effect of the nexus between employment brokers and government departments in Israel (personal communication, 2023). The latest survey from Kav LaOved, an NGO advocating for the rights of migrant labourers in Israel, shows that the average brokerage fee is $10,688, a jump of almost $3000 from previous years. The fact that despite governmental interventions, manpower agencies continue to extract millions of shekels from prospective migrant workers, is evidence of the nefarious connections they have established within political and economic power structures in Israel and source countries (Kav LaOved, 2017).

Given that the manpower agencies in Israel work through multiple layers of secrecy, which hides the money trail and establishes confidential and intimate networks through caregiving community members themselves, who speak the same language as the new recruitee, there is an added pressure on the newcomer to not report the illegal fee (Kav LaOved, 2019). The agents of the network could work in multiple ways, including via illegal Indian migrants in Israel or local non-migrants in India—all enabling and sustaining the influence and function of the Israeli manpower agencies and their counterparts in India. The fact that illegal placement fees are illegal only on paper is an extension of the lobbying power of manpower agencies and the conniving role played by government officials through bribery and corruption. It

is interesting that this exploitative system that has gone unchecked for so long, in fact, survives through a vertical and horizontal hegemonic legitimacy, enabled by agents from both top and bottom. It is encouraging that there is a bilateral agreement in the offing, between India and Israel, in the construction and nursing sectors, to bring an additional ten thousand migrant workers to Israel (Fatima, 2023). However, it is worrying that even within the existing agreements that are expected to safeguard the rights of the migrant workers, the practice of paying placement fees is still rampant.

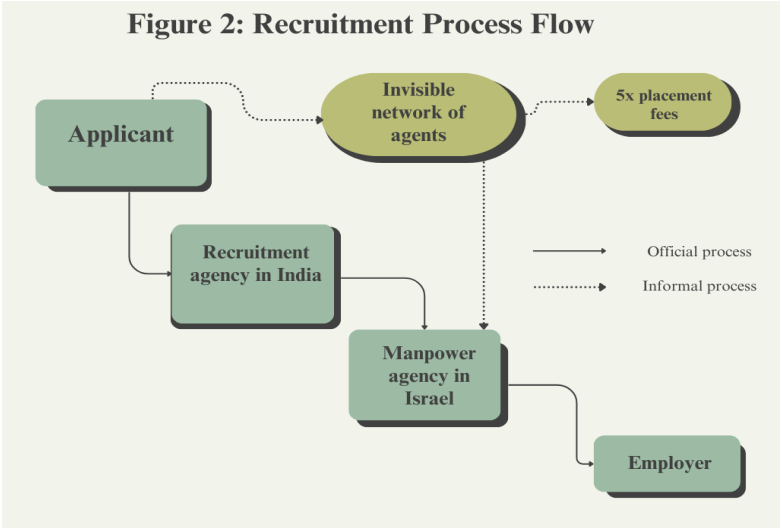

Figure 2: Recruitment process flow

A third and perhaps more effective reason as to why new recruits are ready to pay the fee, concerns the credentials, or the lack thereof, of migrant workers who seek care employment in Israel's relatively high-income labour market. Unlike institutional nursing jobs in Israel and elsewhere, live-in careworkers do not have to furnish proof of their educational and professional qualifications, leaving the door wide open for anybody who can afford the broker's fee to enter the overseas labour market of Israel (Personal Communication, 2023). In fact, several respondents answered

favourably regarding the unregulated system, with a backdoor entry which does not put a bar on age, gender or qualifications, and allowing them to gain access to attractive and relatively better paid jobs in Israel. Although many participants did not respond positively to the exorbitant sum of the broker's fee to be paid initially, others deemed it a safe investment for better life and economic opportunities.

Overseas Community Networks as Islands of Belonging

Alongside state policies, the wage gap between sending and receiving countries, and the demand for cheap labour, there is the additional influence of migration networks that play a pivotal role in enabling overseas labour migration (Lim, 2015). Despite the prevalence of overwhelming sociopolitical and economic structures in India, the larger sociological determinant of cross-border migration flows is the ethnolinguistic networks prospective migrant workers have access to in the receiving countries (Jones & Sha, 2020). Therefore, the intersections of belonging, identity and community become important in shaping the experiences of migrant careworkers in Israel.

The nature of live-in care jobs could be isolating and alienating for migrant careworkers when living away from families for extended periods of time. Most overseas careworkers find themselves connecting to members of their linguistic or ethnic communities in order to feel rooted to their culture and identity (Brown, 2017). Indian migrant communities in Israel are no different, and different linguistic communities tend to host their own weekend get-togethers and outings to connect with compatriots from their home states. Given that the cultural diversity in India works through ethnolinguistic dimensions, most Indian migrant workers find communities that they can connect to on the basis of

their mother tongue. The Malayali[25] migrant careworkers in Israel whom the researcher spoke to confirmed a system that has been followed to retain their traditions in what could be termed a transnational practice of culture and religion.

A large majority of foreign workers adjust to the cultural differences and feeling of isolation through these linguistically and culturally mediated networks. These networks meet regularly during weekends to socialise and for recreational activities, including playing sport and watching movies together, and return to their respective workplaces by the end of the weekend (personal communication, 2023). Food is central to these get-togethers, wherein a large feast is usually prepared by different members of the community. Recreational drinking, conversations and storytelling shaded by nostalgia and homesickness are characteristic of such weekend meetings. Several studies have been conducted on cultural celebrations and festivals as a quintessential feature of the migrant life, and this is not uncommon for the Malayali care workers in Israel too.

The gatherings are usually held in apartments, specifically rented for the weekend for such occasions, and the cost is shared amongst the community members. Coordinated by experienced community members, the access to these activities is restricted, in practice, to acquaintances and friends, making social capital and maintenance of community relations important for a sense of belonging. In effect, these recreational gatherings become sites of cultural experience, nostalgic practice and reaffirmation of belonging to specific ethnolinguistic communities.

These gatherings are also exclusive in that they are occupation-specific. Israelis of Indian origin, or other members of the Indian diaspora in Israel, are not welcome to these groups, which stands in stark contrast to the cultural integration the former undergo. The time between arrival of the community members and their departure to their

25 Malayali is a person who speaks Malayalam and, in this context, denotes persons hailing from Kerala

respective workplaces after the weekend could be termed a reproduction of space of cultural expression. In essence, these gatherings could be termed temporal and geographical islands of belonging.

These spaces also have their inherent political relations, which are different from that of their home states. Despite various existing socioeconomic and political hierarchies back home in terms of caste, class and gender, the newfound migrant communities of belonging serve as a new site of reconfiguring erstwhile hierarchies. Although the definitive dimensions of these reconfigurations are not thoroughly explored in this chapter, all the respondents pointed at the specific aspects of experience and relations with the care agency as important determinants.

Power relations within the weekend get-togethers are shaped by access, acceptability, and compliance. There is a level of acceptability that each community member must achieve by adhering to community norms which some respondents dubbed "coercive". However, the moral and ethical sensibilities and practices of these islands of belonging is slightly adapted and has noticeable differences from the acceptable norms back home. For instance, there is an indifferent acceptability of close friendships and romantic relationships among careworkers despite their marital status, which is rather uncommon and even frowned upon in Kerala society. The purported sanctity of marital relationships and family is not seen as divergent to these extra-marital and mostly secretive relationships, but as factors complementing and, even to some extent, facilitating the maintenance of family relations back home. These communities act as family away from family in all senses, akin to the formation of a new type of kinship through deep personal ties (Liebelt, 2011).

The sense of community is a substantial remedial factor in the mental health of migrant workers. Anxiety, depression, fear of job loss, economic insecurity and separation are common issues that many migrant temporary workers suffer from (Hasan et al., 2021). These issues are more or

less addressed through being part of a community of fellow migrants who can relate to them more than the families back home. It is important to maintain cordial ties with these community members for the sake of social capital. Most newcomers lack extensive knowledge of labour rights, labour legalities and migrant work regimes in Israel so that they are inclined to maintain these connections as support systems, including for timely circulation of important information. These networks are equally crucial in deriving support emotionally, legally, and sometimes financially in the event of an emergency.

A few respondents recounted how the experienced members of the community helped to initiate grievance petitions to manpower agencies and government departments on various occasions, including abuse. One respondent, a female caregiver, remembers that the members of her fellow Keralites in the community helped fundraise for an emergency surgery that her spouse had to undergo back home. Nevertheless, there were a few young respondents who did not agree with the system and conduct of the community groups, as they were "dated", "repressive", and "preachy" towards younger caregivers. However, they concurred with the fact that showing up for weekend meetings was the only way to maintain a sense of community in Israel.

Many experienced members of the community have good working relations with the manpower agency and are able to facilitate connections with prospective candidates for care work. The acceptability and social capital of these senior members are crucial in instilling trust among newcomers and prospectives to pay the placement fee. More often than not, the senior members look out for prospective employees from their home community and leverage common roots to establish trust through personal networks. Within the institutionalised migration regimes, they occupy a "grey space" wherein they operate as an invisible network (Lim, 2015), legitimising the middle-men or agents involved in the recruitment process and the illegal placement fees charged by them. Some respondents commented that these connections helped them distinguish

legitimate offers from fraudulent ones, unlike some cases where caregivers were promised higher wages and charged exorbitant placement fees, essentially pushing them into a debt trap (personal communication, 2023). These networks, which are inclusive of both legal and illegal migrants, are important determinants of the continued flow of careworkers from the source countries. The actual process of recruitment is very complex and shrouded in secrecy, given the intricate and invisible networks of both a personal and impersonal nature at play.

The Image-making of *Pravasi* in Israel

Israel in itself holds tremendous social and cultural capital among Christians of Kerala, who constitute about 18.38% of the total population in the state (Zachariah, 2016). Although specific statistics of migrant caregivers' religious affiliations are not available, all the respondents the researcher spoke with confirmed the significance of the "Holy Land" being a factor in their decision to migrate to Israel for work. The Syrian Christian community in particular attributes significance to Israel as the Holy Land, due to the centrality of the Old Testament to their belief systems[26].

The Malayalam word *pravasi*, with its roots in Sanskrit, translates to migrant. *Pravasi* has myriad connotations that are extensively portrayed in pop culture, literature and theatre in Kerala. The image of *pravasi* is one that is constantly changing and yet stereotypically rooted. Some of the inherent connotations include vanity that comes with perceived high income and status; popularity and respect that comes with the

26 Syrian Christians in Kerala claim a history of 2000 years, tracing their origin back to the historical arrival of St Thomas, the apostle of Jesus, in Kodungallur, Kerala in AD 52. The cultural evolution of Christianity in Kerala signals the synergetic influence of Hindu traditions prevalent in Kerala at the time, which could explain the significance of the culture of pilgrimage to holy places among Kerala Christians, which is missing from reformed branches of Christianity in the West (Thomas and George, 2023).

socially imagined hardships that the migrant has undergone, and the social currency of one who is an expert in international matters. Unlike other parts of India where migrants are considered as travellers, linking pleasure with living abroad is alien to Kerala society which, until recently, predominantly dealt with Gulf migration.

The image of a *pravasi* from Israel is a relatively new concept for Keralites as the bulk of its migrant returnees are linked to the Gulf region. Several studies have probed the reintegration of migrant returnees to Kerala and what it means for their mental health (Afsal and Reshmi, 2020; Khan et al., 2023. However, the phenomenon has not been studied from the perspective of temporary careworkers in the context of Israel as a desired and "promised" land for Christians. Most caregivers the researcher spoke to were rather apprehensive about the economic security once they are back in their home state, something that they share with the Gulf returnees. However, temporary careworkers returning from Israel are reported to undergo shame, stigma and belittling for the intimate forms of labour they perform as migrants. There is much scope for future research on the mental health and social perception of migrants returning to Kerala from Israel, in a society that wholeheartedly projects Gulf returnees as the builders of Kerala's fortune.

When asked about their connection to religiosity, it was rather interesting to learn that religious practices were mostly confined to private spaces, as opposed to their public practice of religious faith in Kerala. Although many historically and biblically significant sites closely linked to Jesus Christ are in Israel, all the senior caregivers responded that they had been to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre only once or twice during their entire stay. Consequently, the mystical appeal of working in a land which is intricately linked to their religious faith was rendered a part of their imagination alone.

Conclusions

Migration at the intersection of labour and care, when examined through the perspective of transnational care interlinkages, presents a case for nuanced investigation. As a labour-exporting state from the Global South, Kerala offers an interesting case study of the motivations, mechanisations, processes and consequences of transnational landscape of care, which is a highly racialised, gendered and sexualised sector of work. The pervasiveness of exploitation in the system has to be seen as a symptom of the larger decay in the global care chains wherein low income and poor communities from the Global South continue to be victimised and harassed by proxies of wealthy governments. The restrictions and inaccessibility of labour rights and surveillance imposed by the state of Israel, which is focused on its ethno-racial nation building, are projected through privatised agencies and employers as the closest units of contact. Malayali migrant careworkers negotiate their sociality, religiosity and culture through community-building exercises that translate to a physical and imaginative space to practise culture, tackle the challenges of isolation and build support networks. Experienced community members also aid newcomers, cultivating trust and legitimising recruitment processes which can be exploitative in nature. Regardless, this interplay of networks sustains the flow of careworkers, serving as temporal and geographical anchors of belonging within new alliances and kinship structures. The image-making of "pravasi" in the context of Israel's care economy reflects Malayali's hypocritical duality of faith and stigma, which also forms part and parcel of the global care economy.

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Chapter 12

The Dynamic Role of the Indian Diaspora in Shaping India's Relationship with the Middle East

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Abstract

This abstract delves into the influential role played by the Indian diaspora in shaping India's bilateral ties with the Middle East. As a critical demographic dispersed across various countries in the region, the Indian diaspora has emerged as a crucial bridge between India and Middle Eastern countries, fostering cultural, economic and political exchanges. The Indian diaspora's historical presence in the Middle East has deep-rooted connections, dating back to centuries of trade, cultural exchange, and migration. Leveraging their cultural affinities and linguistic ties, the diaspora has facilitated seamless interactions between India and the Middle East, acting as agents of cultural diplomacy and mutual understanding. Economically, the Indian diaspora's contributions have been significant, with their diverse skill sets and entrepreneurial spirit propelling growth in various sectors. Remittances from the diaspora play a vital role in India's economy, bolstering trade and investment between India and Middle Eastern countries. Politically, the Indian diaspora's active engagement in the political landscapes of their host countries and India has served to strengthen ties between governments. Lobbying efforts and advocacy for shared interests have contributed to enhanced diplomatic relations, facilitating cooperation on regional and global issues. The article explores successful initiatives initiated

by the Indian diaspora, such as educational exchanges, cultural festivals and humanitarian projects, which have further deepened people-to-people connections between India and the Middle East. In conclusion, the Indian diaspora's pivotal role in shaping India's relationship with the MENA region cannot be underestimated. As cultural ambassadors, economic contributors and political advocates, the diaspora's impact continues to be instrumental in fostering cooperation, understanding, and prosperity between India and Middle Eastern nations.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Diaspora, India, Middle East, Soft Power

Introduction

In the present era, our world is experiencing an unprecedented level of globalisation. This interconnectedness has ushered in transformative changes that were once unimaginable, knitting the global community together. While many associate globalisation solely with enhanced economic and political collaboration, heightened international trade, and a surge in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), it encompasses a significant and often overlooked consequence: the substantial movement and migration of individuals across different parts of the globe. Given these conditions, the examination of diaspora takes on significance and becomes noteworthy. Diasporas are highly diverse in terms of language, identity and social standing. Understanding their socio-economic and political impact, as well as their level of integration and assimilation, becomes pivotal, as these factors play a crucial role in preserving and safeguarding the cultural traditions that foster connections between two countries.

The term "diaspora" originates from the Greek words *dia* (through or over) and *sperio* (dispersal or to sow), which translate to "scattering" or "dispersion". Initially, the ancient Greeks employed the term diaspora to describe citizens of a prominent city who migrated to a conquered land with the intention of colonisation, aiming to assimilate the territory into their empire. In the context of the Indian diaspora, India

serves as the shared ancestral homeland from which people, driven by diverse reasons, have voluntarily or involuntarily migrated to various regions across the globe. This movement of people led to the formation of the Indian diaspora (Lal, 2007, pp. 14–17). As per the Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Diaspora refers to a Greek term used to describe a nation or a segment of a nation that is separated from its state or territory and scattered among other nations. Despite this dispersal, the diaspora maintains and preserves its distinctive national culture. Thus, the Indian diaspora can be described as a collective group of people who can either trace their origins to India or are Indian citizens residing abroad, whether temporarily or permanently (Biswas, 2020). There is a common misconception that India's diaspora solely comprises Non-Residential Indians (NRIs). However, the diaspora encompasses a much broader community, including Non-Residential Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIO), and Overseas Indian Citizens (OICs). This diverse diaspora serves as a significant linkage between different countries. In this article, we will explore the Indian diaspora in the MENA region and examine how it has influenced India's relations with this area.

Diaspora communities may come into existence due to voluntary or involuntary migration, mass exile, or the emigration of economically disadvantaged groups seeking better opportunities abroad. Recent shifts in the global political and economic landscape have led to significant population movements across various regions. The connection between these diasporic communities and their homelands opens up the potential for their eventual return from the adopted country. As such, migration serves as the fundamental origin of the diaspora. These communities, residing as ethnic minorities in their host countries, maintain profound emotional, sentimental, and material ties with their countries of origin (Sinha, 2019, p. 5).

The roots of the Indian diaspora can be traced back nearly four millennia, closely intertwined with India's historical trade connections. Even during the ancient Indus Valley

Civilisation, trade flourished with ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, laying the foundation for small merchant communities that would later evolve into the modern Indian diaspora. From 500 to 1600 AD, trade continued to play a pivotal role as significant Indian diasporas emerged along the Indian Ocean rim (Brahmachari, 2011). These diasporas spanned regions from Zanzibar and Egypt in the West to Yemen and Oman in the Arabian Peninsula, and extended to Arakkan and Malacca in the Far East. The 20th century and India's independence brought forth a new generation of Indians who sought opportunities abroad, contributing to the further expansion of the diaspora. Simultaneously, the oil boom in the Middle East attracted thousands of Indians from southern states, who moved to the region to take up various mid and low-level jobs in the burgeoning petroleum sector. Over the past thirty years, the migration of Indians to Middle Eastern countries has exhibited a consistent upward trajectory, resulting in a robust diaspora of 9.3 million individuals by 2019. A significant portion of Indian migrant workers in the Middle Eastern region gravitates towards the UAE, and Saudi Arabia and Oman are also recognised as prominent destinations. Although most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries experience a periodic influx of fresh Indian migrants every five years, there was a notable alteration in this pattern subsequent to the 2014 oil price shock, leading to a substantial decline in the numbers of new migrants.

Historically, India's maritime trade connected it with various parts of the world, including the Middle Eastern region. Traders from India, especially from coastal regions, ventured into the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula to engage in lucrative trade with the Arab merchants. This trade facilitated the exchange of goods, culture and ideas between India and the Arab world. The Indian Ocean trade routes brought Indian traders, sailors and merchants to the Middle Eastern region, leading to the establishment of settlements along the coasts. Conversely, Arab merchants also visited India and left a considerable cultural impact, particularly in the coastal regions of western India, such as Gujarat and

Kerala (MEA, 2016). Significant Indian migration to the Middle Eastern countries began during the 19th and early 20th centuries, when traders and workers from India moved to the region in search of better economic opportunities. Indians played an essential role in the development of the Middle East's pearl diving industry, trade, and construction sectors. A large number of Indian workers, particularly from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, migrated to countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain to work in various industries. Over time, the Indian community in the Middle Eastern region has grown significantly. These communities have retained their cultural identity while also integrating with the local culture.

Despite the GCC retaining its allure as a favourable destination for Indian labourers, migrants have encountered challenges due to the prevailing employment structure in the area, which results in the exploitation of workers. Operated through the sponsorship system, commonly known as kafala, this framework assigns private employers control over both the immigration and employment status of migrant workers. In recent times, countries within the region have taken measures to address this situation, such as introducing the Wages Protection System (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020) in 2019 and enacting various regulations to counteract discrimination. Certain transformations have been brought about through diplomatic efforts, as evidenced by the Indian government's engagement in signing MoUs on labour rights and contractual terms with Middle Eastern nations (Gupta A., 2019).

In addition, Indian festivals, cuisine, music and Bollywood films have become popular in the region, reflecting a strong cultural exchange. The remittances sent back by the Indian diaspora in the Middle Eastern region have been crucial for India's economy. These financial inflows have helped support families back home and contributed to the country's foreign exchange reserves. In this context, the chapter argues that the significance of the Indian diaspora in influencing India's ties with the Middle Eastern region cannot

be overstated. Serving as cultural ambassadors, economic contributors and political advocates, the diaspora's profound impact remains instrumental in promoting cooperation, mutual understanding and prosperity between India and the nations of the Middle Eastern region.

Review of Literature

In his article titled *India and the Gulf: Exploring Beyond Energy, Islam, and the Diaspora* (2013), Ranjit Gupta highlighted the significant and close interaction between the populations of India and the Middle Eastern region. Several factors contribute to this strong relationship, including bilateral trade, mutual dependence on gas and oil, substantial remittances, and the substantial presence of the Indian diaspora living and working in Middle Eastern countries. As a result of these factors, the GCC countries have emerged as India's primary global socio-economic partner. Additionally, the political and diplomatic ties between India and the Middle Eastern region are continuously strengthened.

In their study titled *What We Know about Diasporas and Economic Development*, Kathleen Newland and Sonia Plaza (2013) emphasised the significant role played by diasporas in fostering economic development in both their host and home countries. The authors presented evidence showcasing how diasporas contribute to trade, investment and technology transfer between the countries they are residing in and their countries of origin.

In her 2007 article titled *Does Migration Matter in Trade? A Study of India's Exports to the GCC Countries*, Sajitha Beevi Karayil investigates India's exports to the Middle Eastern nations, with particular attention to the impact of migration on these trade relationships.

Indian Interests in the Middle East

Post-independence, India established energy relations with the Middle Eastern countries, but these were primarily commercial. Despite having a significant Indian population working in the region, India did not forge political and strategic ties with the Middle Eastern countries. This was due to three main reasons: Firstly, India perceived U.S. dominance in the Middle Eastern countries as a legacy of colonial forces. Secondly, India viewed Israel as responsible for the Arab-Israel conflict. Thirdly, India favoured secular and socialist regimes over conservative monarchies. However, these reasons are no longer relevant today. Presently, the USA is one of India's allies in the region, and India has developed security and economic relations with Israel. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become crucial partners for India (Alterman & Mohan, 2022). The focal points of India's interest in the region are centred on ensuring a stable energy supply, enhancing trade relations and safeguarding Indian nationals employed in the Middle East (Sevilla, 2020, p. 16).

Given India's status as the third-largest consumer of oil and its heavy reliance on energy imports from the Middle East, the Middle Eastern region has become a strategic priority for India. This newfound focus on the region aligns with Saudi Arabia's interest in diversifying its allies beyond traditional Western partners, coinciding with India's realisation of its geopolitical and geo-economic interests. As a part of this growing relationship, major oil companies like Saudi Arabia's ARAMCO and the UAE's ADNOC have increased their engagement with Indian companies, particularly with ONGC. Despite their strong ties with Pakistan, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE refrained from criticising India after the repeal of Article 370, which revoked the special status of Kashmir (Khushnam, 2020). This demonstrated how India's robust economic ties with Middle Eastern countries have led to diplomatic benefits.

Conversely, India holds significant geopolitical interests in Iran, which happens to be the primary regional rival of the

Middle Eastern countries. India's efforts to establish a port in Iran's Chabahar city date back to the 1990s. Despite the impact of sanctions on Iran, the Chabahar Port was eventually completed. On October 29, 2017, India achieved a milestone by initiating the first shipment of wheat to Afghanistan through the Chabahar Port. This port is of utmost importance to both India and Iran as it allows them to reduce their reliance on the Suez Canal for transportation to Europe. Additionally, the Chabahar Port plays a vital role in establishing transportation connectivity between Europe, Central Asia, India and Iran. Given that India does not share a border with Central Asia, the Chabahar Port serves as a key link for India to access the region, which is abundant in natural resources. Furthermore, the competition surrounding the Zaranj-Deleram highway between India and Afghanistan facilitates Afghanistan's access to the sea through the Chabahar Port (Pant & Mehta, 2018). Hence, the Chabahar Port provides India with additional leverage over Afghanistan. By reducing shipping costs and transit times between India and Central Asia by 50% (ANI, 2022), this route significantly enhances trade efficiency. Moreover, the Chabahar Port serves as a countermeasure to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which was developed by China as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By offering an alternative trade connectivity option that bypasses Pakistan, the Chabahar Port provides India with strategic advantages.

In addition to its energy and trade interests, India has taken measures to safeguard the status of its migrant workers in the Middle Eastern states. The prevalent kafala system in the Middle Eastern region, which binds Indian migrant workers to their employers, has been identified as a form of modern slavery, leading to immense stress and even fatalities among Indian migrants. To address these concerns, the Indian government has established the Indian Workers' Resource Center in the UAE and introduced Community Welfare Funds, providing financial assistance to distressed Indian migrants (Calabrese, 2020). Given that India is the top recipient of remittances in the world, protecting the well-being of its

migrant workers in the Middle East has become a significant foreign policy objective for the country.

India's Diaspora Policy in the Middle East

Due to the longstanding trade connections between the Indian subcontinent and the Arab region, Indians have been present in the Middle East for centuries. From the early 20th century until the independence of Middle Eastern countries, Indian skilled workers played vital roles in diverse sectors of the colonial administration (Levaillant, 2017). Following the discovery of crude oil, the region also employed semi-skilled workers. From 1948 to 1970, the Indian presence in the area experienced significant growth, leading to a multiplication in the number of migrant workers. From 1973 to 1987, the surge in international oil prices resulted in a substantial revenue influx to the region. The newly independent monarchies took advantage of this opportunity and initiated ambitious development programs encompassing infrastructure, education, industry, services and agriculture. However, qualified local labour was scarce among Middle Eastern nations, prompting governments to actively encourage the immigration of foreign workers. During the 1980s, a notable shift occurred as South Asian migrants became the dominant foreign communities in the region. They were preferred over Arab workers due to their perceived advantages of being more affordable, highly skilled, and less involved in political matters. Consequently, they progressively replaced Arab workers in various sectors.

Presently, the Middle Eastern region boasts the highest proportion of foreign residents worldwide. Among these expatriate communities, the Indian population is the largest one working in the private sector. Despite facing economic recessions and a slowdown in Indian immigration to the MENA states over the years, India continues to be the primary source of labour for the region. Remarkably, approximately 80% of new workers come from India, filling various roles ranging from unskilled and low-skilled to semi-skilled, with some being illiterate. In the year 2015, the migration of Indian

low-skilled workers to different Middle Eastern countries saw significant numbers, with over 300,000 heading to Saudi Arabia, more than 200,000 to the UAE, 85,000 to Oman, and 59,000 to Qatar. A majority of these migrant workers originate from Indian states such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (MEA, 2016, pp. 210).

In the Middle Eastern region, the majority of migrants arrive on a temporary basis, and the implementation of short-term contracts ensures a swift turnover of migrant workers (Thiollet, 2016). Entry into the Middle Eastern countries is restricted to individuals with a firm job offer and a contract sponsored by an employer. These contracts bind employees to work for a specific period at a predetermined wage level. In return, sponsors are responsible for providing accommodation and food, and covering the travel expenses of the migrant workers (Levaillant, 2017). Unfortunately, this complete reliance on sponsors has resulted in numerous cases of abuse and mistreatment of the workers. Furthermore, the governments of Middle Eastern countries deny foreign migrants, including Indian workers, the possibility of obtaining citizenship, or political and socio-economic rights. Consequently, Indian workers find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position, relying on protective measures from entities such as the Indian government to safeguard their interests.

The Indian perspective towards its diaspora underwent a significant transformation during the country's liberalisation phase, which commenced in the 1980s. This change was closely linked to the growing emigration of highly skilled workers to the United States and the subsequent rise in remittances sent by NRIs. However, in 1990–91, India faced an economic crisis and struggled to garner support from the Indian diaspora to bolster dwindling foreign exchange reserves. As a result, policymakers gradually realised that overseas Indians could play a crucial role as a bridge to engage with foreign governments and contribute significantly to the country's economic development.

In 1998, the Vajpayee government further solidified the growing significance of the diaspora by specifically targeting highly skilled migrants residing in Western countries and encouraging them to advocate for India's economic and political interests. As part of this effort, the Vajpayee government established a high-level committee on the Indian diaspora in 2000, which produced a comprehensive report concerning the diaspora community (Thiollet, 2016). This report served as a catalyst for the establishment of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004, with the purpose of engaging and connecting with the Indian diaspora and providing protection to Indian migrants. These initiatives highlighted a renewed focus on the overseas diaspora in the absence of any official diaspora policy.

Recently, the Modi government has placed even greater emphasis on harnessing the potential role of the diaspora in advancing India's interests abroad and attracting investments from affluent NRIs (Lakshmi, 2015). However, it is worth noting that the socioeconomic backgrounds of Indian migrants vary widely, and as of now, the Indian government has not developed a comprehensive diaspora policy to address all aspects of their needs. This has led to a noticeable disparity between the growing attention given by the Indian state to the Indian diaspora and the inadequacies present in India's migration protection system. In 2015, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs underwent a transformation and was integrated into the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) as a Division of Overseas Indian Affairs. This restructuring aimed to achieve two main objectives: enhance coordination between New Delhi and diplomats stationed abroad and reduce government expenditures. However, this move has had unintended consequences, as per an Indian diplomat serving in the UAE in 2015. It has put increased pressure on the MEA's already limited budget for executing India's diaspora diplomacy. Consequently, Indian diplomats are now tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the security and safety of their citizens abroad, and their ability to develop appropriate responses is seen as a legitimacy test for the

ministry. In response to these changes, Indian embassies and consulates in the Middle Eastern region have undergone recent modernisation efforts. Unfortunately, the impact of these improvements has been limited due to constraints arising from both budgetary and political considerations.

In the Middle East, Indian diplomats rely heavily on the financial and material assistance offered by local Indian associations, which bring together highly skilled workers and businessmen engaged in charitable activities. Recently, Indian embassies have established Forums for the Indian volunteer community to aid workers with medical, legal and financial support, particularly during dedicated open days for migrants organied by Indian diplomatic missions (Abraham, 2012, p. 134). One critical aspect of this support is the provision of legal assistance by volunteer lawyers to workers facing issues with their employers or those who have been arrested. Additionally, volunteers act as interpreters, bridging the communication gap between migrants and Indian diplomats. In some cases, initiatives like the establishment of a shelter for women in the Indian embassy in Oman, funded and supported by an Indian social club's charity, have been implemented. Moreover, the Indian community networks serve as efficient informal channels, enabling the Indian government to monitor, track and reach out to repatriated Indians effectively.

Indian Diaspora as Agents of Cultural Diplomacy in the Middle East

The Indian diaspora has a rich history of cultural exchange and interaction with the world. One of the regions where the Indian diaspora has played a crucial role in fostering cultural diplomacy is the Middle East. With a significant presence in countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait, the Indian diaspora has acted as cultural ambassadors, facilitating a deeper understanding and appreciation of Indian culture in the Middle East. The presence of the Indian diaspora in the Middle East dates back centuries. Historically, Indians have traveled to the region for trade, commerce and

cultural exchange. Over time, these interactions have led to the establishment of vibrant Indian communities across the Middle East. This historical legacy forms the foundation upon which cultural diplomacy between India and the Middle East thrives today. The Indian diaspora in the Middle East plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting Indian culture. They maintain strong ties with their motherland, celebrating traditional festivals, and organising cultural events and religious ceremonies. Through these activities, they showcase the richness and diversity of Indian culture, creating an atmosphere of cultural vibrancy in the host countries.

Indian cultural elements, such as music, dance, cinema and cuisine, have left an indelible mark on Middle Eastern culture. Bollywood movies, Indian classical dance performances and music concerts attract a wide audience in the region. These art forms act as powerful tools of cultural diplomacy, bridging the gap between the two cultures and fostering a sense of familiarity and affinity among Middle Eastern audiences toward India. The Indian diaspora in the Middle East has actively contributed to the establishment of educational and religious institutions (Gautam, 2013). Indian schools, language centres and cultural academies promote Indian languages, history and arts, strengthening cultural ties and promoting a positive image of India in the region. Likewise, Indian places of worship provide a sense of community and spiritual connection for expatriates while fostering interfaith harmony with local communities. Cultural festivals and events organised by the Indian diaspora in the Middle East serve as a platform for cross-cultural interactions. Diwali, Holi, Eid and other festivities are celebrated with great enthusiasm, attracting people from diverse backgrounds. For example, Holi celebrations at the Corniche in Abu Dhabi saw participants from various nationalities joyfully celebrating the festival with Indian colours and music. Also, Diwali celebrations at the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, illuminated with Indian tricolour lights, showcased the UAE's recognition of Indian festivities and cultural heritage (Singh, 2012). These events offer a glimpse into the traditions and customs of both India and

the Middle East, fostering mutual respect and understanding. The Indian diaspora's role in cultural diplomacy extends beyond the realms of art and entertainment. In the business world, cultural diplomacy plays a significant role in fostering economic ties. Shared cultural values and practices often act as a catalyst for business relationships between Indian and Middle Eastern entrepreneurs. The diaspora's insights and cultural understanding facilitate smoother business negotiations and collaborations (Singh, 2012).

Bollywood, the vibrant and prolific film industry of India, has captivated audiences worldwide with its colourful storytelling, foot-tapping music and dazzling dance sequences. Over the years, Bollywood has expanded its horizons and ventured into international filming locations, with the Middle Eastern region becoming an increasingly popular choice. From sprawling deserts to luxurious cities, the Middle East has provided an exotic backdrop for several Bollywood blockbusters. The romantic movie *Dilwale*, starring Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol, was filmed extensively in the UAE. The picturesque locations of Dubai and Abu Dhabi provided the perfect setting for the film's larger-than-life sequences. The iconic Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, showcased its majestic presence in the film, adding a touch of grandeur to the story. The vibrant and bustling streets of Dubai added a charming flavour to the movie, making it a visual treat for audiences worldwide. The gripping action thriller movie *Baby*, featuring Akshay Kumar, was shot in various locations in the Middle East, with Abu Dhabi being a prominent setting. The city's modern architecture and dynamic urban landscapes added a sense of authenticity to the film's thrilling narrative. The film's gripping chase sequences, coupled with the stunning desert landscapes, showcased the Middle East's versatility as a filming destination. In addition, the high-octane action blockbuster *Tiger Zinda Hai*, starring Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif, was filmed extensively in the UAE and Morocco. The exotic locales of Abu Dhabi and its neighbouring Emirates served as the backdrop for the film's adrenaline-pumping action sequences. Additionally, Morocco's scenic

landscapes, including the picturesque Atlas Mountains, contributed to the film's visual grandeur.

The popularity of Bollywood films has led to a growing interest in Indian cinema, with Indian film festivals becoming regular events in the Middle East. The *Indian Film Festival of Dubai* is an annual event that showcases Indian cinema, attracting movie enthusiasts from the Middle East and India, further strengthening cultural ties (MEA, India-UAE Bilateral Relations, 2017). Indian classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Odissi, along with traditional music, have captivated audiences in the Middle East. Indian artists and dance troupes regularly perform at prestigious events and festivals, adding a touch of cultural finesse to the region's cultural landscape. For instance, the *Festival of India* organised in Qatar brought together renowned Indian classical dancers and musicians, promoting cultural exchange between the two regions.

The Indian diaspora has contributed significantly to the Middle East's culinary scene. Indian cuisine, with its rich flavours, aromatic spices, and diverse array of dishes, has earned global acclaim as one of the most beloved and sought-after culinary experiences. The Middle East, a region known for its own vibrant food culture, has warmly embraced Indian cuisine, resulting in a significant surge in its popularity over the years. Historically, the Middle East has shared strong trade and cultural ties with the Indian subcontinent for centuries. These interactions facilitated the exchange of spices, ingredients and culinary traditions, laying the groundwork for the integration of Indian flavours into Middle Eastern cuisine. The presence of large Indian expatriate communities in countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait has further deepened cultural affinities, creating a demand for authentic Indian eateries. In recent years, culinary innovation has played a significant role in the Middle East's growing appetite for Indian cuisine. Many restaurants have creatively fused Indian flavours with local ingredients, resulting in exciting fusion dishes that cater to the diverse tastes of the region's cosmopolitan population. This culinary fusion has

opened up new horizons for both Indian and Middle Eastern chefs, leading to unique and delectable dining experiences. The *Taste of India* food festival in the UAE celebrated the country's diverse cuisine, showcasing the unique flavours and regional specialties from various parts of India. Indian expatriates frequently organise food festivals, cooking workshops and cultural exchanges centred around Indian cuisine. These events not only introduce Middle Eastern audiences to Indian delicacies but also encourage cross-cultural interactions. For instance, the *India Food Festival* in Saudi Arabia provided a platform for Indian and Middle Eastern chefs to collaborate, creating innovative dishes that blend traditional elements from both cultures (MEA, 2022).

The Indian diaspora has actively contributed to the establishment of Indian schools and language centres in the Middle East. These institutions not only provide education in Indian languages but also teach Indian history, culture and values, fostering a sense of cultural identity among Indian expatriate children. The Indian High School in Dubai is a prominent educational institution that offers a comprehensive curriculum and cultural activities, strengthening ties between India and the UAE.

Indian diaspora communities in the Middle East form cultural associations and community groups that organise cultural events, seminars and art exhibitions, promoting Indian culture and heritage. The *Indian Cultural Forum* in Kuwait organises regular cultural events, providing a platform for Indian artists and performers to showcase their talent to a diverse audience.

Thus, the Indian diaspora in the Middle East serves as a potent agent of cultural diplomacy, facilitating a deeper understanding and appreciation of Indian culture in the region. Through their contributions to art, cuisine and festivals, they have created an enriching cultural exchange that bridges the gap between India and the Middle East. Examples of Bollywood's influence, culinary fusion, Diwali and Holi celebrations, and the establishment of educational and

cultural institutes demonstrate the diaspora's commitment to promoting cultural ties and fostering mutual respect between the two regions (MEA, 2022). As cultural diplomacy continues to flourish, the Indian diaspora's role as cultural ambassadors remains pivotal in nurturing the cultural bond between India and the Middle East.

Education: Fostering People-to-People Partnerships

In recent years, Indian education diplomacy in the Middle East has witnessed a remarkable surge, reflecting India's commitment to fostering educational collaborations with its regional neighbours. The Middle East's growing demand for quality education and the increasing recognition of India's academic prowess have paved the way for several successful initiatives. This article explores recent examples of Indian education diplomacy in the Middle East, highlighting the strategic partnerships and cultural exchanges that have cemented India's position as an influential academic destination in the region.

a. Educational Partnerships and Scholarships:

Indian universities and institutions have been actively establishing partnerships with Middle Eastern counterparts to enhance academic cooperation. One such example is the MoU signed in 2020 between India's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. This MoU aims to facilitate faculty exchanges, joint research projects and student mobility between the two institutions, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's cultures and academic expertise. Additionally, the Indian government offers scholarships and incentives to attract Middle Eastern students to pursue higher education in India. The *Study in India* initiative, launched in 2018, has witnessed increasing participation from Middle Eastern students, offering them affordable access to a wide range of disciplines in reputed Indian institutions.

b. Promoting Indian Culture and Language:

India has been actively promoting its rich cultural heritage and languages in the Middle East, fostering a sense of camaraderie between the two regions. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has been instrumental in organising cultural events, music festivals and art exhibitions in the Middle East. For example, the *Festival of India* held in the UAE showcased various aspects of Indian culture, including traditional dance forms, musical performances and art exhibitions. Language training programmes have gained popularity among Middle Eastern students, with Hindi and Urdu language courses being particularly sought after. Institutes like the Indian Cultural Center in Bahrain offer language classes to not only promote cultural exchange but also facilitate smoother communication between Indian diplomats and Middle Eastern citizens.

c. Alumni Engagement and Skill Development:

Indian alumni associations in the Middle East have played a significant role in strengthening educational ties. These associations provide a platform for networking, knowledge-sharing and professional development. The Indian Embassy in Kuwait, for instance, actively collaborates with Indian alumni to organise career fairs, workshops and skill development programmes for Indian students and professionals in the region. Furthermore, India's expertise in vocational training and skill development has garnered considerable attention in the Middle East. The *Skill India* initiative provides training and certification to thousands of skilled workers, empowering them to contribute to the region's economic development.

d. Academic Exhibitions and Seminars:

Indian participation in educational fairs, exhibitions and seminars in the Middle East has been a significant catalyst in promoting Indian academia. The Indian Education Exhibition in Dubai, held annually, provides a platform for Indian universities and institutions to showcase their academic offerings to Middle Eastern students and parents. Such events

facilitate face-to-face interactions and provide valuable information to aspiring students, encouraging them to explore education opportunities in India.

The recent surge in Indian education diplomacy in the Middle East signifies India's proactive approach to building strong academic collaborations and cultural bonds with its regional neighbours. The strategic partnerships, language training programmes, and cultural exchanges have not only strengthened India's influence in the Middle East but also fostered mutual understanding and respect between the two regions. As Indian educational institutions continue to attract Middle Eastern students and India promotes its cultural heritage, the future of education diplomacy in the Middle East holds promise for deeper and more enduring partnerships.

Indian Diaspora Humanitarian Efforts in the Middle East

As a rising power, India increasingly employs humanitarian diplomacy to assert its legitimacy and promote its unique identity. In Buddhism, the concept of *Karunā*, meaning compassion, is one of the Four Immeasurables. Similarly, Hinduism emphasises the value of *dāna*, an act of hospitality towards the needy, as mentioned in the Vedas and the Mahabharata (Gulliot, Penan, & Grandclement, 2022). Incorporating these cultural and spiritual elements, India's approach to humanitarian diplomacy has been shaped by its historical struggle for independence and its solidarity with other developing nations. This background has profoundly influenced India's views on engaging in humanitarian efforts on the global stage. India's humanitarian aid principle finds its foundation in *dharma*, which signifies the righteous path. The norms rooted in Dharma revolve around humanity and humanitarian values, encompassing various guidelines for conducting conflicts. Humanitarian aid is categorised as a form of developmental support, constituting an essential aspect of India's foreign policy framework. In 2016, the National Disaster Management Plan was formulated to enhance India's

resilience to disasters and facilitate the effective direction of humanitarian aid. However, it is worth noting that the allocation of humanitarian aid is sometimes influenced by the ideology of Hindutva, which seeks to establish a Hindu nation within India's borders (TEKİR, 2023).

The Yemeni Civil War

The Yemeni civil war, which has been ongoing since 2014, has resulted in one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world. As the conflict continues to wreak havoc on the lives of millions of Yemenis, the Indian diaspora has emerged as a significant force in supporting India's humanitarian efforts in the region. With their strong emotional ties to India and a deep sense of compassion, the Indian expatriate community has actively contributed to relief efforts, providing aid and assistance to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the war. This article delves into the role of the Indian diaspora in undertaking India's humanitarian initiatives during the Yemeni civil war, highlighting contemporary examples that demonstrate their impact. The Indian diaspora has been quick to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen by organising fundraisers and donation drives. In countries with a substantial Indian community, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Indian expatriates have collectively raised significant amounts of money to support various relief organisations working on the ground. These funds have been channeled toward providing food, medical supplies and other essential aid to Yemeni civilians facing dire circumstances.

Recognising the pressing need for food security and medical assistance in Yemen, the Indian diaspora has actively contributed to distributing food packages and medical supplies to affected communities. In partnership with local and international aid organisations, the Indian community has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to areas that have been particularly hard-hit by the conflict. Their efforts have brought much-needed relief to those struggling to access basic necessities amidst the ongoing

violence and economic instability. The Indian diaspora's commitment to humanitarian efforts extends to educational initiatives as well. Understanding the long-term impact of disrupted education on Yemeni children, Indian expatriates have initiated programmes to support schooling and skill-building projects. By providing resources, funding schools, and sponsoring students, the Indian community has helped maintain educational opportunities for young Yemenis despite the challenges posed by the conflict.

In response to the severe healthcare crisis in Yemen, Indian doctors and medical professionals from the diaspora have volunteered their expertise to provide much-needed medical care. Several medical missions organised by the Indian community have travelled to Yemen to offer specialised treatment and surgery, particularly to those who lack access to adequate healthcare facilities in the war-ravaged country. Also, through social media campaigns, public awareness events and advocacy initiatives, the Indian community has amplified the voices of the affected Yemeni civilians and urged the international community to step up their support for humanitarian aid efforts in the region.

The Syrian Civil War

Since its onset in 2011, the Syrian Civil War has given rise to one of the most devastating humanitarian crises globally, displacing around 14 million people. The conflict has resulted in the tragic loss of over 306,000 lives. Additionally, the war's impact has been compounded by an economic downturn, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Syrian gross domestic product has contracted by 50%, pushing over half of the population into extreme poverty. As of 2022, a staggering 14.6 million Syrians are in dire need of humanitarian aid. The essential requirements for the Syrian people include health services, shelter, access to education and vital food assistance. The scale of the crisis demands urgent and sustained efforts from the international community

to alleviate the immense suffering endured by the Syrian population (TEKİR, 2023).

The Indian diaspora has been at the forefront of fundraising campaigns to support humanitarian organisations actively working on the ground in Syria. Through community-led efforts, charity events, and online crowdfunding platforms, Indian expatriates have mobilised resources to provide financial assistance for essential aid and relief activities. The generous contributions from the diaspora have enabled humanitarian organisations to provide food, medical supplies, shelter and other critical resources to Syrian civilians caught in the conflict. As the Syrian conflict resulted in one of the largest refugee crises in the world, the Indian diaspora has been proactive in supporting Syrian refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries. In collaboration with international organisations and local partners, the Indian community has facilitated the provision of temporary shelters, food, and healthcare services to displaced Syrians in refugee camps. The Indian government pledged $2 million in assistance to help Syrian refugees (MEA, 2017). India financed the construction of a steel plant, a power plant, and two artificial limb fitment camps.

Additionally, the diaspora's support has extended to initiatives that help refugees integrate into their new communities, offering educational opportunities and skill-building programmes. Indian doctors and medical professionals within the diaspora have offered their expertise in medical missions to Syria and neighbouring countries that host Syrian refugees. These medical missions have delivered much-needed healthcare services to those affected by the conflict, particularly in areas with limited access to medical facilities. The presence of Indian medical volunteers has been instrumental in saving lives and alleviating the immense strain on local healthcare systems.

Indian Government Schemes for the Diaspora

Acknowledging the significance of overseas Indians, the Indian government has initiated numerous welfare programmes for the Indian diaspora.

i. Indian Community Welfare Fund for Indians Abroad:

The Indian government has set up the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) to cater to the well-being of Indians living abroad. This fund offers the following services based on the level of need:

1. Furnishing accommodations and meals for Overseas Indian workers facing difficulties in household/domestic roles and unskilled labour;
2. Offering urgent medical assistance to Overseas Indians facing critical situations;
3. Arranging air travel for stranded Overseas Indians requiring assistance;
4. d. Supplying initial legal support to deserving Overseas Indians;
5. Spending on miscellaneous expenses and transporting the remains of deceased Overseas Indians back to India or managing local cremation/burial is covered in cases where the sponsor is unable or unwilling to fulfill this obligation as per the contract, and the family cannot afford the expenses;
6. Additionally, covering the cost of minor fines or penalties to secure the release of Indian citizens held in jail or detention centres is also provided.

ii. Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana (MGPSY):

This initiative is a pension and life insurance fund scheme designed specifically for Overseas Indian workers with Emigration Check Required (ECR) passports. The core aim of MGPSY is to incentivise and empower these overseas Indian labourers through government contributions that facilitate:

1. Accumulation of funds for their eventual Return and Resettlement (R&R);
2. Building savings for their retirement years;
3. Acquiring a life insurance policy to provide coverage for natural demise within the covered period.

iii. Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana (PBBY):

The Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana is a mandatory insurance plan designed for overseas Indian workers possessing ECR passports and heading to ECR countries. This scheme offers a minimum insurance coverage amount of Rs. 10.00 lakhs, payable to the nominee or legal heir in the event of the emigrant's death or permanent disability. This applies to Indian individuals who travel abroad for employment purposes subsequent to obtaining emigration clearance from the relevant Protector of Emigrants (POE). In the unfortunate event of the emigrant's demise, the insurance company not only covers the expenses related to transporting the deceased's body but also reimburses the cost of one-way airfare for one attendant.

iv. Study India Programme (SIP):

The SIP offers an opportunity for young Overseas Indians to participate in a brief course at an Indian University, aiming to acquaint them with India's history, heritage, art and culture, as well as socio-political and economic advancements. The primary emphasis of this initiative is on academic orientation and research. The Indian Government covers expenses such as accommodation, meals, local travel, course fees for the duration of the programme, and 90% of the airfare in economy class.

v. Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards (PBSA):

The PBSA is bestowed upon NRIs, PIOs, or organisations/ institutions established and managed by NRIs or PIOs, who have made notable contributions in any of the following areas:

1. Enhancing the understanding of India abroad;

2. Providing tangible support to India's causes and interests;
3. Strengthening the connections between India, the overseas Indian community, and their country of residence;
4. Engaging in social and humanitarian endeavours within India or internationally;
5. Promoting the welfare of the local Indian community;
6. Engaging in philanthropic and charitable activities;
7. Attaining eminence in a particular field or conducting exceptional work that has elevated India's reputation in the host country;
8. Achieving prominence in skills that have elevated India's standing in that country (for non-professional workers).

The President of India confers this honour during the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention. The PBSA holds the highest distinction among awards granted to overseas Indians.

Challenges to the Indian Diaspora in the Middle East

A significant number of semi-skilled and unskilled Indian labourers in the Middle Eastern region face severe hardships and are deprived of fundamental labour rights. The conditions for many of these workers have further deteriorated due to the economic downturn linked to the recent decline in global oil prices. The majority of Indian workers employed in the private sector in the Middle Eastern region are subject to the visa sponsorship system, commonly known as kafala. Despite some recent attempts at reform, the kafala system continues to link a foreign worker's residency authorization to their sponsor. Typically, workers need explicit permission from their sponsor to switch employers or leave the country. This practice has been criticized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Pethiyagoda, 2017).

Besides infringing upon the fundamental human right of freedom of movement for foreign workers, the kafala system also cultivates a legal framework that lacks essential safeguards for migrant labourers. This environment provides

ample opportunities for employers and employment agencies to exploit the system. As an example, sponsors can postpone wage payments, seize passports, and unjustly deport workers. Additionally, authorities frequently fall short of charging and taking legal action against sponsors who violate laws and contractual obligations (HRW, 2016).

Female domestic workers in particular, employed within family households, encounter a deficiency in legal safeguards that leaves them vulnerable to various forms of mistreatment. These abuses encompass excessive workload, insufficient access to food, confinement against their will, and the infliction of psychological, physical, verbal, and sexual harm (HRW, Middle East Failing to Protect Domestic Workers, 2013). Likewise, labourers engaged in infrastructure and development initiatives frequently find themselves residing in overcrowded labour camps characterised by substandard amenities and demanding work settings. In these conditions, they are deprived of opportunities to engage in social and cultural activities (Khadria, 2014).

The cycle of abuse originates during the initial phases of employment when Indian workers are recruited for Middle Eastern positions. Recruitment agencies, which have proliferated due to high turnover, frequently deceive and mistreat workers. In some cases, these agencies collaborate with potential employers or even fraudulent employers to exploit workers who might lack education and information. They offer false promises regarding wages and working conditions, while misinforming workers about their rights.

The United Nations Development Programme acknowledges that foreign workers in the Middle East confront such difficulties, attributing them to racism, social exclusion, a lack of accountability, and the misuse of power by employers (OHCHR, 20132). The labour conditions of migrant workers in the Middle Eastern region frequently do not comply with the principles outlined in the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. These principles encompass the right to freedom of association, the right to engage in

collective bargaining (for improved wages or benefits), and the elimination of forced or compulsory labour. Notably, Middle Eastern states have not ratified the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1948. Consequently, migrant workers are unable to form unions or protest against these unjust labour practices (HRW, 2015).

Conclusion

The Indian diaspora contributes to the improvement of India's reputation and soft power. Indian migrant labourers are widely recognised for their peaceful and tolerant demeanor. According to the MOIA (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs), India's accommodating and diverse society, where individuals from varying faiths, languages, ethnic backgrounds, and political beliefs coexist and prosper, plays a crucial role in fostering positive migration patterns and labour mobility. The diaspora serves to reinforce, solidify and evoke the historical and cultural connections between individuals in India and the Middle Eastern region. In certain Kerala communities, individuals have embraced diverse Arab cultural, culinary, financial and other traditions upon returning from their experiences in the Middle East. This is evident through various indications such as Kerala businesses proudly displaying Arabic signage. Consequently, India's diaspora plays a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral relations and offering a sense of familiarity and security to people (Philip, 2016). This familiarity can, in turn, facilitate Middle Eastern policymakers in promoting the expansion of relations with Delhi, even in sensitive sectors such as defense cooperation. Furthermore, advocating for improved working conditions for the diaspora further enhances this soft power, as it reflects the shared perspective held by Indian citizens and leaders that their civilisation is deserving of respect. This perspective has partly contributed to India's rejection of certain forms of development assistance (Pethiyagoda, 2017). Therefore, this rationale should logically extend to the rejection of acquiring

remittance income at the cost of accepting degrading conditions for Indians working overseas.

Enhancing the circumstances of overseas workers has the potential to generate substantial political advantages for Prime Minister Modi and politicians who advocate for their rights. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the increasing political influence of the diaspora. Indian labourers based in the Middle Eastern region maintain significant voter constituencies within India. The infusion of remittances has elevated living standards and reshaped social classes in countries that export labour, allowing both working-class and middle-class returnees to gradually ascend the social hierarchy. This progression has facilitated their achieving higher social standing and even intermarrying into more elevated societal circles.

Consequently, the political influence of migrants and their families has grown, prompting Prime Minister Modi to prioritise their concerns and garner their support. This becomes particularly relevant to Modi, given that a noteworthy proportion of India's migrants in the Middle East originate from states with substantial Muslim populations. It is important to note that Muslims are less inclined to support the BJP, compared to the larger Hindu community (Naujoks, 2009).

India should consistently incorporate diaspora-related issues into all aspects of bilateral negotiations with the Middle East. These bilateral engagements should be formalised through new Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). In instances where existing MOUs lack enforcement, India should exert efforts to encourage greater compliance. With organisations like Human Rights Watch (HRW) advocating for substantial changes, Delhi could, at the very least, actively promote the need for reform.

New Delhi should take steps to prompt Middle Eastern states to revise their labour regulations, addressing the specific and intricate challenges encountered by migrant workers, often arising due to the kafala system. There

should be a concerted push for Middle Eastern countries to integrate migrant workers as essential components of their comprehensive strategies for achieving equality. Additionally, considering the substantial presence of the Indian diaspora in the Middle Eastern region, the potential departure of these workers could present a risk to the economies of Middle Eastern states. When taken together, these factors can significantly bolster the persuasiveness of advocating for reforms.

Undoubtedly, the Indian diaspora represents a significant strategic advantage, but this should not be confined to mere competition between the ruling party and the opposition. The opposition's attempts to foster a sense of unity within India have been evident through initiatives like the Bharat Jodo Yatra, and Rahul Gandhi's visit to the United States illustrates his engagement with a broad spectrum of Indian individuals, ranging from university students to truck drivers. As the importance of the diaspora continues to grow as a crucial indicator of a nation's global standing, countries in the Asia-Pacific region can draw inspiration from India's approach to valuing and leveraging their diaspora communities as a unified entity.

In light of this, the parliamentary standing committee's report on the welfare of Indian diasporas emphasises the need to reinforce trust through the implementation of policies such as worker rehabilitation and skill development initiatives. This constitutes a significant stride towards formulating strategies that capitalise on the diaspora's potential, encompassing scientists, professionals and individuals. Furthermore, this approach serves as a means to bridge geographical gaps and expand influence over the diverse landscape of Indian identity, thereby creating a broader avenue to reconnect with their origins.

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Chapter 13

Indian Cinema: Indian Diaspora's Culture Export to the Middle East

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Abstract

The Middle East accounts for one of the largest Indian diasporas abroad, mostly concentrated in the Gulf Region. This diaspora has been instrumental in establishing people-to-people contact between India and the Middle East. One of the ways in which the diaspora has been successful in bringing the cultural elements of India to the region is through the popularisation of Indian cinema. From the screening of Raj Kapoor's "Awara" as early as 1951, to releasing multiple Indian movies every week, be they from Bollywood or other regional cinemas like the Tamil and Malayalam film industry, the presence of Indian cinema in the region has come a long way. The Middle East has also transformed from simply being a consumer of Indian cinema to being a location where movies are directed and produced. Due to the presence of a large Indian diaspora, as well as an Arab audience which consumes Indian cinema just as enthusiastically, the movies and the film industry, particularly Bollywood, have moved beyond being a source of entertainment. For many, it is a representation of India and its culture. Due to the strong influence that Indian cinema has in the region, it also contributes significantly to the economy of Middle Eastern countries, including in the tourism, food and clothing sectors, and in the region's own filmmaking ecosystem. Indian cinema is thus a cultural export, strongly espoused by the Indian diaspora, which in current times has

become an integral part of the social and cultural landscape of Middle Eastern countries.

History of Cinema in the Middle East

The history of cinema in the Middle East dates back to the late 19th century and is a part of the colonial history of the region. The first time cinema entered the region was in 1896, when films by the Lumiere brothers were screened in Alexandria and Cairo for an exclusive Egyptian audience. After that, screening of films during theatre performances became a norm in Egypt, with the first regular cinema being constructed in 1906 in Cairo by the French company Pathe. By 1908, Cairo and Alexandria had five film theatres and by 1930 the construction of cinemas had expanded to nearly all Arab countries, with each of them having a dozen of their own. While cinema halls had popped up in various countries during the colonial period, the production and consumption of films were largely dominated by foreign and non-native people. Egypt was the only country in the region to have started developing its indigenous film industry during colonial rule (Viola Shafik, 2007).

As the Middle Eastern countries got their independence, the national filmmaking process started expanding beyond Egypt. By the end of the 20th century, while countries like Libya and Saudi Arabia had only produced a few short films, others such as Syria, Lebanon and Iraq had produced 150, 180 and 100 movies respectively. Egypt, however, continued to remain the cinema hub in the region, having produced 2500 films at that point. With the expansion and popularity of Egyptian cinema in the Arab world, and the lack of support in their own countries, various Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian filmmakers migrated to Cairo and joined the Egyptian film industry (Priya, 2019). While the film industry in the region had made progress, the volatile environment present due to inter-state wars, the intervention of extra-regional powers, and religious conservatism, hampered the growth of the industry in various countries. Saudi Arabia, where public cinema was made illegal in 1988, and the ban only removed in 2018, is one

such example. Similarly, countries like Syria and Iraq, while producing films, were not able to establish a flourishing film industry due to a lack of resources, government intervention and the absence of social, political and economic stability in the country.

On the one hand, some of the major film industries saw a decline in the late twentieth century, while on the other hand, countries like Qatar, the UAE and Oman started gaining attention, especially in the past two decades. The first Qatari movie, "Aqaribabzah" (Clockwise), produced by Khalifa al Muraikhi, was released in 2010. The Doha Film Institute was also launched in the same year to encourage filmmaking, and since then has co-produced films like "The Cruel Summer", "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" and "Black Gold". While Oman does not have a fully-fledged film industry, the country has been trying to build institutions to boost film production in the region. The creation of the Muscat International Film Festival and the Oman Film Society, and Oman's entering into formal agreements with film organisations from across the Arab world, can be seen as significant steps to give an impetus to local film production. The UAE has represented one of the most successful stories of creating a film ecosystem in the region. The first Emirati film, "The Dream" was released in 2005, and since then multiple local productions have taken place. With the establishment of government organisations like the Abu Dhabi Film Commission (ADFC) and Dubai Film & TV Commission (DFTC) as well as some of the most significant film festivals such as the Abu Dhabi Film Festival, the Dubai International Film Festival, and the more recently established META Film Fest, the UAE has positioned itself as the media and cinema hub in the region. Saudi Arabia, since the removal of the ban on film screening in 2018, has been investing heavily in the entertainment industry. This thrust has come as a part of Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030", with the goal of diversifying the economy. In March 2023, Saudi Arabia's Cultural Development Fund (CDF) announced the launch of its Film Sector Financing Program, with a budget of SR879m ($234m). The Kingdom in the past five years has thus taken some significant steps to

encourage film production in the country, as well as building a strong film ecosystem.

While the film industry continues to expand in most of the Middle Eastern countries, one of the most unique characteristics of the industry in the region is that Middle Eastern cinema, unlike cinema from other regions, is not limited to its geographic identity. This is primarily because of the history as well as the current demographic of the Middle East, particularly the Gulf. Historically the connections between the Middle East and other regions such as Central Asia, East Africa, East Asia, Europe, North Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia have been established through maritime and terrestrial trade routes. Currently, "expatriates constitute between 40 and 88 per cent of Gulf populations" (Hudson & Yunis, 2021, p. 10). Such a demographic has led to the formation of a film industry that is highly diverse and actively engages with other prominent film industries such as Bollywood and Hollywood. Both the history and the current existence of the film industry in the Middle East are thus an amalgamation of a colonial past, changing regional dynamics and a cosmopolitan environment that is the future of various cities in the region.

Indian Diaspora and Its Connection with Indian Cinema in the Middle East

The Middle East accounts for the largest Indian diaspora in the world, with their numbers reaching up to 8 million. Out of these, approximately 3.4 million live in the UAE, followed by about 2.5 million in Saudi Arabia and nearly 1 million in Kuwait. These large diaspora communities of Indians in the region have led to the formation of transnational cultural connections, exporting festivals, music, films and other elements that connect migrants to their homeland.

One of India's cultural exports that has flourished largely due to the Indian diaspora is the Indian cinema. While various countries in the Middle East showcase films from across

India, the most dominant ones include films from the Hindi (Bollywood), Malayalam, and Tamil Film Industries. While Bollywood is the largest film industry in India and thus has a larger reach, the strong presence of regional cinema is due to the prominent migration from certain states of Southern India. According to the Tamil Nadu Migration Survey of 2015, countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait account for 1.1 Tamil emigrants, with the largest populations being in the UAE (400 000) and Saudi Arabia (350 000). Similarly, according to the Kerala Migration Survey of 2018, 1.8 million Malayali emigrants live in the Middle East, with the UAE (830 000) and Saudi Arabia (480 000) having the highest concentrations. These significant numbers of the diaspora population have acted as facilitators for the popularisation of Indian cinema in the Middle East.

Another contributing factor is the large number of Hindi and Urdu speakers that reside in various parts of the Middle East, coming not just from India but from other South Asian countries as well. Bollywood has thus seen a huge amount of success in the region. Bollywood's popularity, themes and language have a transnational character which has allowed it to become deeply immersed in the Arab world. Hindi cinema made its way to the Middle East as early as the 1950s, with some of the initial and widely successful films being Raj Kapoor's "Awara" (1951), Mehboob Khan's "Aan" (1952) and "Mother India" (1957) and Satyen Bose's "Dosti" (1964). The movie "Awara" was also dubbed into three Middle Eastern languages, namely Persian, Turkish and Arabic. "Until the 1980s, one-third of all film exports from India were for the diasporic and local populations in the Arab Gulf states" (Thussu, 2013, p. 139). One of the oldest overseas distributors of Bollywood films was the Hinduja group. It was started by Parmanand Deepchand Hinduja, who moved to Iran in 1919 with his family, and is said to have had good relations with the Shah of Iran. They "distributed Indian cinema in Iran and the Middle East from the 1950s to 1970s" (Dwyer, 2013, p. 410), the first being Raj Kapoor's "Shree 420" in 1957. However, it was in 1964, with the distribution of the movie "Sangam"

that the Hinduja group earned its first million through the film distribution business. The Hinduja family is one of the examples of Indian diaspora members in the Middle East being not just a consumer of Indian cinema but also a facilitator of it.

Over the decades, the diaspora population in the region has surged and so has Bollywood's popularity. With the increase in demand and growth of the entertainment industry, the number of Hindi films being released in the region has also exponentially increased. While the UAE, with the largest Indian diaspora in the region, has been a consistent consumer of Bollywood, it was only in 2018 that Saudi Arabia, home to the second largest Indian diaspora in the Middle East, lifted its 35-year-old ban on cinema. "Gold" became the first Bollywood film to be released in the country. Currently, the GCC market accounts for about 20 to 35 per cent of the total overseas box office collections of Bollywood movies. The region has also hosted various award shows related to Bollywood, such as IIFA and Filmfare. Three IIFA Awards have been hosted in the UAE, particularly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, in the years 2006, 2022 and 2023, while the Filmfare Middle East Achievers Night was hosted in Dubai in 2022. The constant interaction between India and the Middle East through Bollywood caters to the tastes of the people living there. From releasing movies a day before they get released in India to hosting award shows, the Gulf, especially the UAE, has seen an influx of Bollywood stars, bringing the Hindi Film Industry closer to the Indian diaspora in the region.

Another facet of this inclination towards Bollywood also emerges from the actors working in the movies. More often than not, the movie plot is secondary to the hero of the film. From the Raj Kapoor craze in Iran, to the Big B Amitabh Bachchan's popularity in Egypt and the immense fame that Shahrukh Khan and Salman Khan enjoy in the Gulf countries, this adoration of Bollywood actors over the decades indicates the consistent demand for Hindi cinema in the Middle East. The fame of Bollywood actors has also made them an integral part of the social, cultural and economic spheres in the Middle East. Amitabh Bachchan was granted an honorary doctorate

by the Egyptian Academy of Arts in Cairo in April 2015. It was also the first time that the academy granted an international actor an honorary doctorate. He also received the Lifetime Achievement Award in Saudi Arabia in January 2023. A similar kind of reception was accorded Shahrukh Khan, who received Morocco's prestigious Medal of Honour in 2012 as well as the Global Icon of Cinema and Cultural Narrative award at the Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF) in 2022, among many other awards. Various Bollywood celebrities such as Shah Rukh Khan, Urvashi Rautela, Sanjay Dutt and Sunil Shetty have received the UAE Golden Visa as well.

The fame of Bollywood celebrities can be further deduced from the various brands that have chosen them as their brand ambassadors and promoters. Some prominent examples include the selection of Shah Rukh Khan as the tourism ambassador of Dubai, Ranveer Singh as that of Abu Dhabi, and Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif for Splash, the largest high fashion retailer in the Middle East. It is thus the popularity of Bollywood in the region which makes these actors a suitable option for marketing campaigns, as they allow companies and brands to target the Indian diaspora, as well as the Arab local population who are familiar with them.

While the Hindi film industry has a strong presence in the Middle East, it is not the only one, with multiple Tamil and Malayalam movies being released and viewed in the region. When Saudi Arabia re-opened its theatres, "Kaala", a Tamil film starring Rajinikanth, became the first Indian movie to be released there. South Indian actors like Mohanlal, Mammootty, Tovino Thomas and Prithviraj Sukumaran are among the few Indian celebrities to have received the UAE's Golden Visa. The region has also hosted the South Indian International Movie Awards multiple times since its inception in 2012, with the most commonly used location being the UAE, followed by Qatar where the award show was held in 2019. The Middle East has thus formed a strong connection with not just the Hindi film industry but also other regional cinemas from India.

Reception of Indian Cinema in the Arab World

The Indian diaspora in the region has played a significant role in increasing Indian cinema's popularity and reach in the Middle East. However, over the decades, Indian films have moved far beyond just catering to the interests of the diasporic imagination and have additionally built a loyal audience within the local Arab population. This acceptance of Indian cinema by the local population emerges from a long history of cultural connections between India and the Middle East. In the case of Bollywood in particular, "the melodrama of Hindi film, which is about love and often about the family, along with the music and the 'magic' of the movies, is usually mentioned as the main attraction" (Dwyer, 2013, p. 413). Another facet of the region's inclination towards Indian cinema and its community-oriented themes emerges from a lack of similarity that the Arab population often feels between their culture and the Western individualism that is depicted in Hollywood movies.

One of the oldest examples of the receptiveness of Indian cinema, especially Bollywood in the Middle East, can be seen through the fame that actors like Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan have gained in the region. Mohd Ahmad Abdel Rahman, a professor At Al-Azhar University, Cairo in an interview with Times of India said: "If any Indian is spotted on the streets, the first welcoming words people often utter are "Hello, Amitabh Bachchan". Bachchan's film "The Great Gambler" (1979) was shot in Egypt, and his 1985-released film 'Mard' is said to have been screened for months in the country's theatres. Egypt's then-President Gamal Abdel Nasser attended the 7th Filmfare Award in the year 1960, further showcasing the strong influence that Bollywood had in the region. This immense popularity of Bollywood, however, was seen as a threat to the Egyptian film industry, as a result of which a ban on Indian films was imposed in 1987. It was only in 2013 that this ban was lifted, with the release of "Chennai Express" starring Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone. A similar reception was seen in other countries as well. According

to Aftab Ahmed, Oman started screening Indian movies in the 1970s, broadcast every Friday by Omani television (Priya, 2019). By the 1990s, the Khan triumvirate of Bollywood Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Salman Khan had garnered immense popularity in the Middle East, especially in the UAE. Various Bollywood actors thus became household names in Middle Eastern countries. According to Asad Khan, the cinema manager of Grand Cineplex Dubai, nearly forty per cent of the Indian cinema audience is comprised of Gulf nationals. In the past few decades, the number of movies released in Arabic has also increased. More than 35 television channels, such as Sana TV, B4U Aflam, Zee Alwan, Zee Aflam and MBC Bollywood have been launched in the region, showing Indian content in the Arabic language to cater to the demand of Arab audiences (Priya, 2019).

The presence of a huge Indian diaspora in the region and their intermingling with the local Arab population over the years has also led to the sharing of cultural elements. The elevation of India's position in the international environment and the increase in its soft power, coupled with the growing presence of influential Indians in the region, has further made Indian cinema and its themes an integral part of the lives of the local population. Indian cinema has thus branched out from cinema halls to the regular lives of people, for example, in Diwali and Holi-themed parties, Bollywood-inspired wedding festivities or birthday celebrations. The UAE acts as an example of such absorption of Indian cultural elements as portrayed through Bollywood into the lives of the Emiratis. Emirati children come to attend Bollywood dance classes and Henna celebrations before weddings, and often take inspiration from Bollywood-style music, decoration and dresses. Indian cinema in this context moves beyond its existence as simply being a source of entertainment. It becomes synonymous with India's culture for those who are not familiar with the region and derive all their knowledge of India from that shown in Bollywood and other regional films. For the Arab audience, Indian cinema has thus become both an integral part of the

region's entertainment industry and a representation of India and its culture.

Indian Cinema and the Middle Eastern Economy

The Middle East as a region is not just a consumer of Indian cinema but is also a place where various movies are directed and produced. The region acts as an attractive option for various filmmakers due to its proximity to India, picturesque landscapes, and discounts on major hotels, airlines and locations. The governments of Middle Eastern countries such as the UAE, Egypt, Oman, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have made it easier to shoot films in the region, providing easy access to resources such as cars, wardrobes and glamorous locations.

One of the earliest films shot in the region was "The Great Gambler", starring Amitabh Bachchan and Zeenat Aman and released in 1979. The movie was partly shot in Cairo, Egypt, with the pyramids forming the backdrop as Amitabh Bachchan gets surrounded by people pointing guns at him in one of the scenes. Since then, Egyptian landscapes have graced Indian movies multiple times, as in the song "Ajooba" from the movie "Jeans" (1998), "Suraj hua madham" from "Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham" (2001) or "Teri ore" from "Singh is King" (2008), all shot at the Pyramids in Giza, Egypt. Another commonly used location in the Middle East is the UAE, with some of India's top-grossing movies being shot there. Between 2015 and 2017 alone, about 12 Bollywood movies were shot in the country. Some prominent ones include "Welcome" (2007), "Happy New Year" (2014) and "Welcome Back" (2017) in Dubai; "Bang Bang" (2014) in Abu Dhabi; and "Airlift" (2016) in Ras Al Khaimah. Some other locations that have been used include Oman (Once Upon a Time in Mumbai, Dobaara and Velli Vechathil), Lebanon (Phantom), Turkey (Guru and Dil Dhadakne Do) and Jordan (Kajraare and Krrish 3). With Saudi Arabia removing the ban on films and opening itself up to filmmakers from around the world, this Kingdom with its vast resources is slowly gaining attention as a shooting location. The country hosted approximately 26 productions in 2021

and 2022 and amongst these is the upcoming Bollywood film "Dunki". Directed by Rajkumar Hirani with Shah Rukh Khan as the lead actor, "Dunki" is the first Bollywood movie to have been shot in Neom, Saudi Arabia. The region thus continues to remain an attractive option for Indian filmmakers to invest in.

The shooting of these movies also boosts employment opportunities in the region, with crew members being hired from the shooting locations itself. "Happy New Year" and "Airlift" are two prominent examples where local casting was done from across the UAE, with around 1600 extra casts being hired for the former. According to Selena Randhawa, in 2016 and 2017, US$ 1.7 million worth of investments were made by Bollywood into the Dubai economy. Indian film celebrities' familiarity with the UAE has also made them some of the top real estate investors. Some Indian celebrities who own properties in Dubai include Bollywood actors Abhishek and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Sanjay Dutt, Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Boney Kapoor, and South Indian celebrities Mohanlal and Mammootty.

The Middle East has been using the stardom of Indian celebrities and their influence in both India and beyond to further provide an impetus to their economy. Indian actors have been acting as promoters for various brands in the Middle East, from fashion and healthcare to the travel and tourism industry. In the position of brand ambassadors, they play two roles based on where the brand is located; first to appeal to South Asians living in their home countries, and second to use the popularity of these Indian actors in the Middle East and globally to achieve the objectives. Shar Rukh Khan and Ranveer Singh being signed as tourism ambassadors for Dubai and Abu Dhabi respectively, as well as Amitabh Bachchan partnering with Saudi Arabia's Omara Dates to launch them in Indian markets, act as an example of the first role. Meanwhile, Katrina Kaif and Salman Khan for Splash, and Deepika Padukone for Qatar Airways, are examples of the second role. The impact of this strategy can be seen in Salman Khan's appointment as the brand ambassador of the fashion brand 'Splash' in 2013. In an interview with CNN, Raza Beig, CEO of Splash, remarks

that when they did the market research for their campaign, it was found that about 97% of Arab consumers were familiar with who Salman Khan is. He further states that the brand saw a nearly 28% boost in its sales during Khan's first year as brand ambassador. Beig also says that while competing with international brands, having Bollywood celebrities as promoters, with their faces gracing billboards and campaign videos, makes the brand stand out as a regional retailer.

Indian cinema, in particular Bollywood, has also worked to boost the tourism industry in the Middle East, especially in cities of the UAE. According to Jamal Al Sharif, chairperson of the Dubai Film and TV Commission, the shooting of films in Dubai has positively impacted the tourist footfall in the Emirate. He further states "Films have contributed to the positive image of Dubai, and the storyline, themes and characters of a film can elicit associations and emotions towards a place, thereby enhancing its potential as a travel destination." According to the Tourism Performance Report, January–April 2023 published by Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, the city received the highest number of international guests from India, with their numbers reaching up to 806 000. The numbers of Indian tourists visiting Dubai saw a 46 per cent increase from the year 2022 and an 11 per cent increase from the year 2019. While it is difficult to draw a direct correlation between Indian movie shootings and tourist visits, the constant use of locations in Middle Eastern countries for filming, showcasing their glamorous architecture, picturesque landscapes such as deserts or beaches, and a luxurious lifestyle, has over the years elevated its potential as a travel destination, evidenced by the increasing number of Indian tourists to the region. Another attempt to expand the popularity of Bollywood among South Asians and other tourists is the establishment of the Bollywood Theme Park by Dubai Parks and Resorts, which first opened in 2016. While the theme park, after seven years of operation, announced its closure in April 2023, it was one of the top tourist attractions during the initial years of its operation. The park was divided into five zones: Bollywood

Boulevard, Rustic Ravine, Mumbai Chowk, Royal Plaza and Bollywood Film Studios, along with six themed restaurants showcasing cuisine from different parts of India, and eight retail stores selling Bollywood-related merchandise. The park also displayed scenes from nine Bollywood films, along with 20 live shows and dance sequences.

The presence of a theme park dedicated solely to the film industry from India highlights the popularity of Bollywood in the region, and how Dubai has utilised it to add another reason for tourists to spend more days in the city thus boosting its tourism industry.

Middle East and Indian cinema's strong connection has thus led to a mutually beneficial economic relationship, where the region accounts for some of the largest overseas box office collections and at the same time, the popularity of Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, is being utilised by Middle Eastern countries to positively impact various industries in the region, from tourism, fashion and real estate to the regional entertainment industry as well.

Government Policies Towards Indian Film Industry

The Middle East's emergence as a favourable filming and production location has been made possible by the initiatives taken up by the governments of the countries in the region, and the policies framed to make them suitable for filmmakers all around the world. Constant efforts have been made in the form of creating incentives and business-friendly regulations, e.g., providing production facilities and trained crew to encourage collaboration between the region and the film industries of other countries.

Amongst all Middle Eastern Countries, the UAE in the past two decades has established itself as one of the regional cinema hubs, with a number of movies being shot across the country, from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to Ras Al Khaimah. Multiple factors have led to the UAE's position as one of the

most favourable shooting locations. The country provides a 30 per cent cash-back rebate on production spend, including travel and accommodation, along with professional crew and supplier bases. Over the years, the UAE has been successful in building infrastructure that can accommodate productions of all sizes. It has also created institutions like the Emirates Short Film Festival, the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), and the Dubai Studio City production hub, to encourage and assist film production. Dr. Abdulnasser Jamal Alshaali, the Ambassador of the UAE to India, when asked about the support provided to filmmakers in the UAE, stated: "Armed forces supply hardware such as trucks, choppers, and military vehicles, and government agencies help with logistics such as filming permits, road closures, etc." (2013).

Indian filmmakers have thus enjoyed easy access to production facilities, efficient logistical support, and multiple incentives provided by the government to produce some of the top-grossing Indian movies. "Happy New Year", starring Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone, the majority of which was shot in Dubai, is one such example. Jamal Al Sharif, the Chairman of the Dubai Film and TV Commission (DFTC), stated that the entire crew of the film received free access to the Atlantis Hotel to shoot, as well as discounts on Emirates Airlines' flights and travel visas (2017). Similarly, for the shooting of the film "Baby", producer Vikram Malhotra remarks how the Abu Dhabi Film Commission efficiently made arrangements for the required shooting backdrops and locations (2014). Apart from the shooting of movies, the government has also been instrumental in organising and hosting film festivals and award shows related to the Indian film industry. The 2022 IIFA Awards held at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism of Abu Dhabi, is one such example.

While the UAE has been one of the most favoured locations for shooting films in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is a rising competitor in the region. The Kingdom under its "Vision 2030" is investing heavily in the entertainment industry in order to establish a strong filmmaking ecosystem

in the country. Saudi Arabia is currently offering a 40 per cent cash rebate on production spend, the highest of all other Middle Eastern countries, along with other production facilities. While only one Bollywood film, "Dunki", has been shot in Saudi Arabia to date, the country's connection with the Indian film industry is growing stronger due to government-initiated collaborations. In 2022, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Culture, Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammad bin Farhan Al Saud, along with Film Commission CEO Abdullah Al Qahtani and executives from NEOM, the Red Sea International Film Festival, Film AIUla and the MBC Group, made a 3-day visit to India. They met with some of the leading Bollywood actors and producers such as Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar and Saif Ali Khan to explore partnership opportunities between the Indian and Saudi film industries. Of the partnership between the two countries, Prince Badr stated: "From talent, through to production, distribution, and technical know-how across the value chain, there are plenty of areas for both countries to collaborate and create content that is suitable not just in their respective countries, but also for a global audience" (2022). The visit of Saudi Arabia's minister to India, particularly to meet the actors of the Indian film industry, thus shows the latter's importance in the Kingdom.

Apart from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, countries like Jordan and Turkey also provide rebates of 15–25 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. The regulations regarding film production, as well as the facilities and resources provided by the Middle Eastern countries, have continued to facilitate a smooth collaboration between the Indian Film Industry and the country where the shoot is taking place.

Conclusion

The connection between India and the Middle East, while centuries old, continues to strengthen through modes of social, economic and cultural cooperation. While agreements and collaborations hinging on economic and geopolitical significance between the two regions have gained the utmost

importance in recent times, it is the people-to-people contact that has sustained the relationship between the two for decades. The Middle East accounts for one of the largest Indian diasporas in the world, acting as a natural bridge between the two regions. The diaspora also works as a medium for the export of cultural elements such as food, clothing and belief systems. One of the most successful cultural exports of India to the Middle East is the Indian cinema. From being watched by both South Asian expatriates and Arab audiences, to being a source and partner in the economy and film industry of the Middle East, Indian cinema in the region has expanded its sphere of influence and continues to do so. It not only acts as a reflection of India as a whole but also plays a significant role in increasing India's soft power in the region. While Indian cinema faces tough competition from other film and media industries, such as Hollywood and the Korean entertainment industry, it continues to hold importance in the region particularly because it is not simply a form of entertainment, but surpasses that to act as a cultural element that is fondly perceived by both South Asian and other diasporas, as well as the local Arab population in the Middle East.

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Chapter 14

Kurdish Diaspora's Diverging Political Aspirations in the MENA Region

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Abstract

The main Kurdish political parties in the Middle East have different political and ideological goals. Varying approaches to the Kurdish issue are based on differences emanating from different ideologies and political interests among different groups. For instance, in Syria, the Movement for a Democratic Society seeks to create a democratic and decentralized confederation that promotes diversity in ethnicity, religion, and gender equality. Conversely, the Kurdish National Council advocates for Kurdish autonomy within Syria. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its associated groups throughout the region are opposed to Kurdish nationalism, and advocate for a democratic, confederal, multi-ethnic initiative instead. Their focus is on promoting grassroots democracy, cultural rights recognition, and self-administration within the existing borders of the states controlling Kurdish territories, rather than challenging those borders. This research aims to explore the geopolitical and historical context of the Kurdish diaspora's presence in different countries in the region; to examine the nuances and dimensions of the current political aspirations of the Kurdish diaspora in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); and to analyse the future repercussions of current political aspirations of the Kurdish diaspora.

Keywords: Kurdish, diaspora, political, MENA

Introduction

The Kurds inhabit a region spanning approximately 392,000 square kilometers and covering parts of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Based on recent demographic statistics from the four countries, the total Kurdish population is estimated to be around 28 million. In Turkey, the eastern and southeastern areas are referred to as "North Kurdistan", with a Kurdish population of approximately 15 million residing in an area of about 190,000 square kilometers. In northern Iraq, the region is known as "South Kurdistan", with around 7 million Kurds living in an area of about 125,000 square kilometers. The northeastern part of Syria is called "West Kurdistan" or "Rojava Kurdistan", where about 2 million Kurds inhabit an area of approximately 12,000 square kilometers. Lastly, the northwestern region of Iran is called "East Kurdistan", with a Kurdish population of about 4 million residing in an area of about 65,000 square kilometers (Manyuan, 2017).

From the 1960s with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to the 1990s with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), political parties actively promoted Kurdish nationalism and advocated for their people's rights. The PKK, in particular, adopted a new name and political agenda, calling itself the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress. In pursuit of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights, the PKK even endorsed Turkey's full membership in the European Union, hoping that this would exert pressure on Ankara to address the Kurds' grievances.

This research endeavors to provide a comprehensive examination of the geopolitical and historical context of the Kurdish diaspora's presence in various countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. By delving into their migration patterns, settlement, and interactions with host societies, the study aims to understand the factors that have shaped the Kurdish diaspora. Additionally, the research seeks to analyse the current political aspirations of the Kurdish diaspora in the MENA region. It involves an exploration of their demands for cultural recognition, political

representation and autonomy, along with an assessment of the strategies they employ to achieve these objectives. The study goes beyond the present circumstances to project the potential future repercussions of the diaspora's political engagement, shedding light on its possible influence on regional dynamics, governance structures and state-society relations. Through qualitative research methods such as content analysis, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the Kurdish diaspora's political landscape, contributing to academic knowledge and policy development.

The Geopolitical and Historical Context of the Kurdish Diaspora's Presence in Different Countries in The Region

During the premodern era, neither the Ottoman nor Iranian states had fixed borders, and the modern concepts of "territorial integrity" and "sovereignty" were not adopted until the early 20th century. Their primary concern was centralising power so as to effectively collect taxes and enforce military service through appointed governors. To reduce the Kurdish presence in the fertile lands west of Lake Urmiya, both the Iranian monarchs and the Ottoman regime took different measures. The Iranian monarchs resettled Turkish tribes like the Afshar and Qara Papakh in the region, while the Ottoman regime forcibly deported some Kurdish tribes to far-off territories, including Libya. However, the state's attempts to assimilate the relocated populations into the state culture and language were not successful, as these were primarily confined to the court or the capital city. In the absence of state-sponsored mass education, official language, mass media, and modern institutions, the deported Kurdish populations managed to maintain their language and culture. They were known by their neighbors as Kurds or identified by their Kurdish tribal or clan names (Nezan, n.d.).

In the aftermath of World War I, the Ottoman part of Kurdistan was redivided and incorporated into Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Secular and nationalist regimes assumed power

in Turkey and Iran and implemented harsh assimilation policies. In Turkey, a law from 1934 mandated the transfer of non-Turks, mainly Kurds, to Turkish-speaking regions, limiting their population to 5%. Kurdish villages and towns were depopulated, and Turks were resettled in Kurdish areas. Turkey and Iran suppressed several Kurdish revolts in the 1920s and 1930s, forcibly resettling around one million Kurds in western Turkey after the 1925 Kurdish revolt. The suppression of Dersim Kurds from 1937 to 1938 has been regarded as a genocide, leading to waves of refugees entering neighbouring countries (Olson, 2000).

Subsequently, the 1950s saw a majority of Kurdish Jews leave historic Kurdistan. This was triggered by the Iraqi government passing laws that revoked their citizenship and froze their assets, accompanied by bomb attacks on Jewish establishments in Baghdad. In recent years, connections between Kurds in Israel and their homeland have strengthened, with cultural initiatives fostering ties. Political initiatives seeking official support between Israel and the Kurdish Regional Government also exist, but the main motivations remain cultural and nostalgic (Kara, 2019). Israel's Jordan also saw Kurdish immigration, with the Kurdish population in Jordan believed to range between 60,000 and 70,000 individuals, who maintain their political influence. Furthermore, the Kurdish diaspora maintained a positive relationship with the Jordanian court (Williams, 2014).

In contrast, Turkey and Iran aimed to destroy the tribal, feudal, and religious centres of power among the Kurds. Their policy was to integrate Kurds as citizens rather than recognising them as a distinct group with self-rule or cultural and linguistic rights. Iraq, under British Mandate and the monarchy, acknowledged limited Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights, but the suppression of the Barzani revolt from 1943 to 1945 led to several hundred refugees seeking asylum in the Kurdish region of Iran. In the latter part of the 20th century, two significant developments resulted in the major uprooting and resettlement of Kurdish populations both within the region and internationally. The first factor

was the ongoing coercive assimilation policies implemented by the governments of Iraq, Iran and Turkey, which led to a growing resistance among the Kurdish people. As a response to these oppressive policies, armed conflicts erupted in Iraq intermittently from 1961 to 2003, in Iran from 1967 to 1968 and again since 1979, and in Turkey since 1984.

In Turkey, significant events such as the 1980 military coup and the armed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) from 1984 to 1999, along with ongoing repression, led to a forced urbanisation process within the country. These factors pushed more Kurds to seek refuge in diasporas across the region and around the world. The Turkish government, treating the PKK's demands for self-rule as terrorism, destroyed and evacuated hundreds of villages and hamlets, resulting in a significant internally displaced population. Additionally, the Southeast Anatolia Project, a major hydroelectric and irrigation network, flooded several hundred villages and displaced hundreds of thousands of villagers.

In Syria, repression of Kurds began in 1958 with the formation of the United Arab Republic and continued in the following years. Many Kurds were stripped of Syrian citizenship, and plans were made to depopulate Kurdish regions and replace them with Arab settlers. This led to a sizable Kurdish refugee population seeking asylum in neighbouring countries like Lebanon. In Iran, the armed conflict between the Kurds and the Islamic state also created a significant refugee situation, with tens of thousands seeking refuge in other countries. These wars and conflicts have not only contributed to the formation of diasporas but also fostered interactions among trans-state Kurds, leading to both unity and conflict within the fragmented Kurdish community (Benjamin, 2023).

Over the years, Kurds in Syria have faced challenges, including periods of repression, discrimination and political activism. The first three coups following Syrian independence were carried out by officers of part-Kurdish background. However, Kurds were subsequently purged from senior army

ranks during Arab nationalist rule. Repression and conflicts persisted, leading to Kurdish urbanisation and political activism. Similarly, the issue of the Kurdish problem has had a significant impact on Turkey's foreign policy over the years. During the 1990s, some Arab states did not provide support to Turkey in its efforts to combat the PKK, which led Turkey to strengthen its relations with Israel (Gumusluoglu, 2016). A parallel situation appeared to be repeating itself as the PKK's active militant branch in Iran, known as the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan, necessitated cooperation between Turkey and Iran (Kara, 2019).

Nuances and Dimensions of Current Political Aspirations of the Kurdish Diaspora in the MENA

Turkey

Tensions have escalated between Turkish authorities and Kurdish groups, such as the PKK, Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), and People's Defense Units (YPG), which is the Syrian Democratic Union Party's armed wing with ties to the PKK. These groups have conducted various attacks against Turkish authorities in the southeast. Ankara faced a dilemma as it relied on the Kurdish people's protection in its war against the PKK at home and the PYD in Syria. While it is unclear which states supported Barzani's efforts, Israel overtly backed the Kurdish people's quest for their own state, despite considering the PKK a terrorist group. Saudi Arabia also saw a benefit in using the Kurds to weaken Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, and sent signals supporting a Greater Kurdistan to reduce the ambitions of these countries (Hearst, 2017).

YPG is "heavily influenced by the ideas of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been in jail in Turkey since 1999, convicted of treason." (Perry & Jones, 2022). Abdullah Öcalan's vision calls for a "democratic nation project" that can unite people of various ethnic backgrounds and cultural traditions in Turkey, Syria and the Kurdistan region. He

criticises the concept of nation-states in the Middle East, arguing that they have caused disasters and deepened the crisis in the region. Öcalan believes that a third world war is taking place globally, with the Middle East as its centre of gravity, and the fate of capitalist modernity's third world war will be determined by developments in Kurdistan. He advocates for a democratic nation solution that fosters peace, equality, freedom and democracy, exemplified by the self-administration of Rojava in Northern and Eastern Syria. Öcalan emphasises the importance of a democratic negotiation and social reconciliation to solve the long-standing Kurdish–Turkish conflict and calls for a dignified peace and meaningful democratic solution in Turkey. However, he has been held in total isolation on İmralı Island since 1999 (Öcalan, 2020).

Meanwhile, the PKK's ideology has evolved, and it now advocates for a decentralised system of local self-governance called "democratic confederalism" (Palmer & Holtz, 2023). The PKK has repackaged itself with the formal name of "Union of Communities in Kurdistan" (KCK) (Saeed, 2019, 102). "KCK is intended as the first step of transformation from political movement to social movement." The KCK aims to protect "Kurdish and other minorities from assimilation and politicising them and increasing their awareness against fascist and genocidal attacks and could be seen as a resistance against any threat that wants to attack diversity and democracy." Cultural linkages such as the official recognition of the Kurdish language and the establishment of civil institutions that aim at promoting gender and youth equality while focusing on "elimination of unemployment and poverty" remain part of the KCK's aspirations. Notably, the KCK also aims to focus on ecological improvement, that was seen to be deliberately destroyed. These efforts are part of the Democratic Autonomy Project that the KCK proposes as an "alternative model of managing society to that of the centralist statist authority in Turkey" (Saeed, 2019, 170-175).

Iraq

The Kurdish political movements in Iraq are marked by complex alliances, shifting loyalties and armed conflicts. Iran's involvement played a significant role in supporting different Kurdish factions, influencing the dynamics of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq (Bruinessen, 1986). In Turkey, a series of pro-Kurdish parties were established over the years but faced repeated bans by the Constitutional Court. The first was the People's Labour Party (HEP) in 1990, which later merged with the Social Democrat Party (SHP) for elections in 1991. Despite gaining 22 seats in the Turkish Grand Assembly, the HEP was banned in 1993.

After its disbandment, the Freedom and Democracy Party (OZDEP) was formed in 1993 but was also outlawed, leading to the establishment of the Democracy Party (DEP). However, DEP members faced legal challenges, with some MPs sentenced to prison and others seeking refuge in Europe. Following this pattern, the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) emerged in 1994, becoming the first Kurdish party to participate in national elections. Although it gained significant support in the Kurdish region, it failed to cross the 10 percent threshold required to enter the Turkish Parliament. HADEP was eventually banned in 2003. The Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) was founded next, gaining around seven percent of the total votes in the 2002 elections but still not enough to secure parliamentary seats. DEHAP later merged with the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which faced accusations of being the political wing of the PKK. In 2009, the DTP was banned, and its co-chairs were stripped of their immunity and barred from political membership for five years. The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) emerged as the eighth pro-Kurdish party, with a focus on seeking a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue through peaceful means. However, like its predecessors, it also faced the risk of being outlawed by Turkey's Constitutional Court (*History of Kurdish Political Parties in Turkey*, n.d.).

Notably, the HDP, established in October 2012, built upon the democratic goals of its predecessors by actively engaging with diverse non-Kurdish groups. It emerged from the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK), which was a coalition comprising the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), along with leftist parties, women's associations, environmentalist organisations, and associations representing various ethnic and religious minority communities (Aziz, 2022).

Initially, several early pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey were focused on communism and economic empowerment, uniting Kurds and Turks toward a common objective. However, as pro-Kurdish advocates became more outspoken about Kurdish rights, differences arose within these parties regarding the priority of these rights. Consequently, Kurdish activists established their own communist and socialist parties. While these groups initially cooperated with other left-leaning counterparts, the 1960 anti-communist crackdown led to greater independence and emphasis on regional identities rather than communist affiliations for pro-Kurdish political parties. When attempts to integrate the pro-Kurdish movement into the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) faced resistance, a majority of its remaining members formed the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Labour Party (HEP) (Koontz, 2021).

The HDP, formed in October 2012 through the consolidation of 20 socialist parties, is recognised as a pro-Kurdish leftist party. The HDP's policy statement delineates its objectives, notably advocating for the self-determination rights of the Kurdish people. The party actively seeks a nonviolent and democratic resolution to the Kurdish predicament, emphasising equality and voluntary unity. Furthermore, the party endorses causes such as decentralised governance, gender parity, environmental conservation, education, support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and more (LGBTQ+) community, socially progressive policies centred on workers, and the elimination of obligatory military service. The HDP also aims to attract additional

minority demographics, including secular and liberal voters. The HDP maintains loyalty to Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the banned PKK, but functions within the framework of the Turkish political system (Lansford, 2016).

Syria

In Syria, the Kurdish political landscape is characterised by the presence of two opposing parties, namely the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC). The PYD currently controls territory in Syria and leads the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which serves as a local partner to the US-led Global Coalition. However, despite its territorial control and military role, the PYD faces challenges in terms of international recognition and participation in negotiations concerning Syria, unlike the KNC, which enjoys a recognised status. The discord between the two Kurdish parties can be attributed to their differing ideologies and the interference of regional and international actors. These factors have contributed to a lack of harmony within the Kurdish political landscape in Syria. Nevertheless, there have been recent efforts from both sides to reconcile their differences through direct negotiations. These steps indicate a willingness to find common ground and work towards a more unified Kurdish political front in Syria. However, the journey towards reconciliation may still face obstacles due to the deeply entrenched ideological differences and external influences on the Kurdish political scene.

Unlike other parts of Kurdistan, the political party divisions within Syria, particularly the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistane li Syria-PDKS), are notably complex. Most Kurdish political parties in Syria, with the exception of the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD), have emerged as a result of their separation from the PDKS, which was founded in 1957. Throughout history, Syrian administrations have not recognised or allowed the PDKS and subsequent Kurdish political parties to participate in Syrian elections. These parties have faced prohibitions, lack of recognition, and increased pressure, as they have

been viewed as a threat to the country's integration and Arab identity. Consequently, the rights of these Kurdish parties have been limited. Despite the challenges they have faced, the Kurdish political opposition in Syria has pursued a sensitive and moderate approach to advocate for the establishment of a separate Kurdish state in neighbouring countries. Their struggle has been characterised by peaceful and democratic methods.

The PYD, founded in 2003 by Syrian Kurds, has adopted a distinctive stance by neither siding with the Syrian regime nor with the opposition. Instead, the PYD has justified its position by highlighting the neglect of the Kurdish people's natural and democratic rights. The party has shown a preference for resolving current issues pragmatically and peacefully. However, the PYD has also embraced the principle of armed struggle when deemed necessary to address existing problems (Tugdar & Al, 2017, 28-29). The Kurdish National Council (KNC) was formed in October 2011 in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Initially comprising 11 Kurdish parties, its membership grew to 15 in 2012 with the addition of other parties and movements. However, the number decreased to 13 by 2018. Many of the parties within the KNC align themselves with the ideology of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which governs the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The council also includes left-wing Kurdish parties and youth movements, some of which emerged after the start of the Syrian revolution.

The Syrian PYD maintains close ties with the Turkish PKK, which has been designated as a terrorist organisation by the United States, the European Union and Turkey. Despite this association, individual PYD officials deny any direct connection and assert that the PYD operates independently, even though it collaborates with the PKK in the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK). The KCK is an alliance of Kurdish forces and parties from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, following the approach of democratic federalism under the leadership of the PKK. The KNC played a crucial role as one of the founding members of the National Coalition for

the Forces of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition in 2012. Members of the KNC actively participate in various leadership bodies, including the High Negotiation Committee and the Constitutional Committee. These engagements demonstrate the KNC's significant involvement in Syrian political affairs and its efforts to represent Kurdish interests within the broader Syrian opposition. The KNC considers Peshmerga as part of its command structure (al-Ghazi, 2021).

However, the PYD has chosen not to align itself with the main Syrian opposition platforms, such as the Syrian National Council, the Syrian Coalition for the Forces of the Revolution, or the Free Syrian Army. Instead, it maintains its own path and objectives, leading to complexities in its relationships with other Syrian political factions. At present, the PYD holds the leadership position within the Democratic Society Movement (TEV-DEM), which is a coalition comprising several parties such as the Assyrian Union Party, the Democratic Peace Party of the Syrian Kurds, and the Kurdistan Liberal Union Party. The People's Defense Units (YPG) serves as the military wing of the PYD and leads the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a military alliance formed by various armed factions.

The objective of the collective is to bring about a resolution to the Syrian conflict through a decentralised framework that guarantees the rights of minority groups, including the Kurds. Unlike the rebel factions in western Syria that aimed to overthrow Assad, the YPG and SDF have largely steered clear of direct confrontation with him throughout the seven-year war. This has distinguished them from the aforementioned rebels. Both the SDF and YPG affirm that their goal is not to establish an independent nation (*Kurdish-Backed Body Aims to Widen Authority in Syrian Northeast*, 2018).

The PYD has two main objectives: achieving constitutional recognition of Kurdish rights and establishing autonomous governance. In terms of the first goal, the PYD shares similar aspirations with other Kurdish parties in Syria, all part of the Kurdish National Council, seeking recognition of Kurds as a distinct ethnic group with political and cultural

rights, and advocating for a nation with robust institutions ensuring equal rights for all citizens. Regarding the second objective, which involves creating democratic autonomy, the PYD diverges from the KNC, its main political rival. The KNC follows a "Barzani approach" that aims for a power shift from clans to the state, aligning with liberal nationalist principles, similar to Iraq's model. In contrast, the PYD pursues a bottom-up strategy, where local communities govern autonomously within a unified Syria. Essentially, the PYD envisions a decentralised Syria, where decisions are made at the local level and then coordinated with higher levels of the system (Kızılkaya et al., 2021).

Iran

The recent protests in Iran have reinvigorated diaspora politics, with Kurdish opposition groups facing challenges in finding common ground for the future of the country and the rights of Kurds within it. Cracks in the Kurdish opposition became apparent when Abdollah Mohtadi, the leader of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala), a Kurdish leftist-nationalist party, joined the Georgetown Group. This alliance, announced at a prominent event at Georgetown University in February, included seven other Iranian opposition figures and celebrities, such as Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last Shah, activist Masih Alinejad, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, and others. The group released a "Solidarity Charter", outlining a vision for a future political system that is "decentralised", "democratic", and "secular", to be established through a referendum. However, the Georgetown coalition suffered a setback when Pahlavi and Esmaeilion withdrew their participation in late April. Despite this, Alinejad, Boniadi, Ebadi, and Mohtadi appear to have remained involved. It is worth noting that the charter signed by Mohtadi was rejected by leaders of other major Iranian Kurdish groups. Mohtadi defended his participation by citing political pragmatism, stating that the current priority is to "topple the Islamic Republic", and that ethnic communities like the Kurds can later expand their demands once this goal is achieved.

The fate of the Georgetown Group remains uncertain, but the tensions within the Kurdish opposition underscore the challenges of uniting various groups with differing visions for Iran's future and the rights of ethnic minorities, including the Kurds (Salih & Faris, 2023).

Meanwhile, the PYD/PKK and Iran have developed an alliance. Iran seeks to establish a secure route to its Hezbollah-controlled territory in Lebanon by leveraging the PYD/PKK's control over parts of Syria. This strategic move directly contradicts the interests of the US. The historic relationship between Iran and the PKK persists, with the PKK's stronghold in northern Iraq encompassing the Qandil Mountains, some of which are within Iranian territory. Iran's response to the PKK, despite Turkish pressure, has been relatively subdued. In contrast, Iranian security forces have targeted the KDPI, aligned with the KDP. While Iran has shown sympathy toward the PKK and provided limited military cooperation with Turkey, its support has transitioned to being orchestrated through Iran-led Shia militias spanning Syria to Iraq. This complex situation further intensifies the regional dynamics and the challenge it poses to the security interests of the various actors involved (Ozkizilcik, 2021).

Future Repercussions of Current Political Aspirations of The Kurdish Diaspora

The political aspirations of individual Kurdish parties within the diaspora have far-reaching implications for both their respective host countries and the broader Middle East region. These aspirations are characterised by diverse ideologies, strategies, and relationships with regional and international actors. The PKK's commitment to democratic confederalism and local self-governance reflects a departure from its earlier emphasis on armed struggle. The YPG's role as the military wing of the PKK has implications for security dynamics in Turkey and Syria. PKK and YPG's close alignment with Abdullah Öcalan's vision for a democratic nation project carries the potential to influence the Kurdish struggle

and shape negotiation processes with Turkey and Syria. Meanwhile, continued ties with the PKK could hinder the YPG's international recognition and limit its participation in diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving the Syrian conflict.

However, the HDP's efforts to engage with diverse non-Kurdish groups and advocate for a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue signal a commitment to inclusivity and peaceful coexistence within Turkey. The party's connections to Abdullah Öcalan and its association with the PKK's ideology pose challenges to its domestic and international legitimacy. The HDP's goals of decentralisation, gender parity, environmental conservation, and support for minority rights have the potential to influence Turkey's domestic political landscape and policies that could provide an alternative to Recep Tayyip Erdogan's conservative Justice and Development Party.

Turkey's pro-Kurdish party, the HDP and its leftist allies have called on their supporters to vote for Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the main opposition candidate, in the recent presidential election, opposing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The HDP, Turkey's third-largest party, had previously decided not to field a presidential candidate and strongly hinted at supporting Kilicdaroglu. HDP co-leader Mithat Sancar emphasised that the upcoming election is crucial for Turkey, leading them to back Kilicdaroglu, whose goals align with theirs in ending Erdogan's rule. The HDP's support broadens Kilicdaroglu's alliance and complicates Erdogan's long-standing hold on power (*Turkey's Pro-Kurdish Party Backs Erdogan's Rival for President*, 2023). While the PKK's original objective was to achieve Kurdish independence from Turkey, since the 1990s this objective has changed. Öcalan now claims to advocate "democratic autonomy" for Kurds, with a focus on equal cultural and political rights within the Turkish state rather than secession. The HDP/BDP have supported the "democratic autonomy" vision, with a particular declared focus on respect for minority rights (Kurdish Political Representation and Equality in Turkey - House of Commons Library, 2021).

Presently, there is an ongoing tension between leftist parties and the pro-Kurdish movement, which has evolved to include a broader opposition coalition, including conservative nationalists. Similar to the past when the CHP resisted promoting the pro-Kurdish movement to avoid alienating their Kemalist base, nationalists within the party now avoid openly embracing their opposition allies for fear of losing their support (Koontz, 2021).

The KNC has severed its ties with the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) and suspended its membership in the Syrian National Coalition. Kurdish factions are reevaluating their survival strategies and alliances as civilians flee the incoming bombardment in the so-called "safe zone". The KNC is concerned that the US might desert its allies like the PYD and change the demographics of northeast Syria (Koontz, 2021).

In Syria, the PYD's pursuit of democratic autonomy and self-governance within Syria's decentralised framework shapes the political landscape in areas it controls and influences the broader Syrian conflict. The PYD's relationship with the PKK and collaboration with the SDF could likewise limit its involvement in negotiations concerning Syria's future. The KNC's alignment with the KDP and participation in Syrian opposition bodies, like the Constitutional Committee, reflect efforts to represent Kurdish interests within the broader Syrian context. The differing ideologies and strategies of the PYD and KNC underscore challenges in forging a unified Kurdish political front in Syria and addressing divisions within the Kurdish diaspora.

From the perspective of Kurdish history in Syria, there has not been a major contradiction between the Kurdish community and the Assad family. Both Hafez and Bashar Assad have used the Kurdish issue as a bargaining chip to control Turkey's actions (Ibrahim, 2019). This approach has allowed Kurdish groups like the PKK and its affiliated parties and armed forces to grow in Syria. While Kurdish armed forces like the HPG have engaged in conflicts with the Syrian government during the civil war, their main objective was to push Syrian

forces out of West Kurdistan, which they have largely achieved. The SDF fought against the Islamic State because the latter attempted to conquer the "Democratic Federation of Northern Syria". The Kurdish forces have not conducted military operations beyond the boundaries of West Kurdistan. The ultimate goal of Kurdish political parties and armed forces in northern Syria is to establish an independent Kurdish state, with the "Federation" serving as an essential part of it. As long as the Bashar regime accepts the "Federation" as a de facto "state within a state", the Kurdish groups are not likely to insist on overthrowing the regime. Leaders of the PKK, the Democratic Union Party, and the SDF have clearly stated this position (Manyuan, 2017).

The willingness of the Bashar regime to recognise the Kurdish people's desire for independence is slated to determine the policy direction of Kurdish political parties and armed forces in northern Syria (Al-Khalidi, 2019). Assad and Russia aim to persuade the Kurds to dissolve their partnership with the United States (Zaman, 2023). If the regime is confident of long-term support from Russia, it may oppose Kurdish independence. However, if it lacks such confidence, it might tolerate the de facto independence of the Kurdish territories to secure its political survival. The PKK's push for Kurdish autonomy within existing states may have broader implications for the Kurdish population across the region. Kurdish communities in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran may become more assertive in demanding political rights and cultural recognition. This could lead to both opportunities for dialogue and cooperation, as well as potential challenges and conflicts with central governments in the respective countries.

Both the PYD and the SDF view negotiations as a means to gain increased international recognition and potentially secure a seat at the negotiating table on Syria, even though Turkey opposes their involvement. Initially, negotiations were prompted by concerns over Turkey's threat of military operations targeting areas under PYD control, such as Qamishli and Kobani, following Operation Peace Spring in 2019. Moreover, the "SDF says it can be part of the Syrian army, but

only if it becomes an army that protects the people and that is the army of a democratic Syria" (Kızılkaya et al., 2021).

It is important to note that many Syrian Kurds join the YPG not out of ideological allegiance to the PYD, but due to practical incentives like jobs, privileges and access to essentials during war. This utilitarian motivation, rather than shared beliefs, drives their involvement. There have been reports of forced recruitment by the YPG that could lead to adverse effects. Moreover, the YPG's alignment with the US and the Syrian regime is subject to change. The Pentagon partnered with the YPG out of strategic necessity, not an endorsement of their democratic values, following the end of the Free Syrian Army programme. This choice yielded limited combat engagement despite significant funding (Gunter, 2019, 575).

However, the current situation appears to have shifted with the Biden administration. The PYD now believes that the US will continue to support the SDF and its presence in the region. This has led the PYD to have less of an incentive to engage in negotiations compared to previous years. However, continued offences by Turkey may lead to some changes.

Conversely, the KNC stands to gain significant benefits from the ongoing dialogue and its outcomes. For the KNC, participating in the management of the regions in north-eastern Syria through negotiations is an opportunity to safeguard its political interests and garner support from its followers. Since the rise of the PYD in Kurdish-majority areas, the KNC has experienced a decline in its support base due to several factors. One key reason is the restrictions imposed by the PYD on the KNC's activities in Syria. Moreover, internal fragmentation and divisions within the KNC have also contributed to its waning popularity. At the same time, the PYD has achieved some success in effectively governing the regions it controls, which further impacted the KNC's support. The military operations of Olive Branch and Peace Spring, along with subsequent violations by factions of the Syrian National Army against the local Kurdish population,

have further alienated many KNC supporters. The perceived weakness of the KNC's responses to these violations has also played a role in the loss of support.

Furthermore, if the Autonomous Administration gains greater international recognition, some Kurdish parties within the KNC might be tempted to participate in it independently, potentially weakening the cohesion and influence of the KNC as a unified political entity. Therefore, engaging in negotiations becomes crucial for the KNC to maintain relevance, protect its interests, and counterbalance the growing influence of the PYD in the region (al-Ghazi, 2021). In more recent times, the KDP faced criticism and protests, with accusations of violence against protesters by the party during the 2011 demonstrations, leading to public outrage. Moreover, the party has been criticised for operating like a "mafia organization", with familial connections and nepotism influencing its leadership and decision-making. Despite criticism, the KDP has maintained a broad base of political allegiances and is considered a populist and nationalist party today (Kurdish Democratic Party KDP, n.d.).

Notably, in Iran, Komala's involvement in alliances like the Georgetown Group demonstrates a pragmatic approach to opposition politics and a willingness to collaborate with other Iranian opposition figures. The party's pursuit of Kurdish autonomy within Iran may impact domestic politics and relationships with other Iranian Kurdish groups, potentially influencing efforts to address Kurdish rights and self-determination. In the wake of the unsuccessful Georgetown alliance and in an effort to capitalise on the weakening protest movement inside Iran, Kurdish opposition groups are shifting their focus to develop a united political strategy. This move is motivated by Tehran and Baghdad's increased pressure on Iranian Kurdish groups in Iraqi Kurdistan to disarm and dissolve their camps, which has raised concerns about disunity among them.

Nevertheless, major Iranian Kurdish groups like Komala, PDKI, and PJAK advocate federalism as a means to grant Kurds

full autonomy while preserving Iran's territorial integrity. Kurdish representatives emphasise the need for realism and pragmatic considerations in their pursuit of a federal united Iran. They argue that the international community and regional powers prefer a stable Iran over a failed state, which could lead to internal unrest and create a migrant crisis.

Despite the different alliances that have emerged, observers believe that the differences among Kurdish parties are primarily strategic and not related to their overall political objectives. Many members of Iran's non-Persian ethnic communities, comprising almost half of the population, feel marginalised and discriminated against by the state's emphasis on Persian culture and language. These communities are seeking to strengthen the opposition front and are considering alliances with other ethnic groups, such as Arabs, Azeris, and Baluch, who share similar grievances.

The PDKI and other Kurdish groups plan to present their political platform to the Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran, an opposition body comprising diverse political organisations from various ethnic communities. The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK), once an opponent of the Shah and later siding with Saddam Hussein, is also positioning itself as supportive of the political rights of Iran's ethnic communities. They have used the term "nationalities" to describe these communities, indicating a significant political move with implications for collective self-conception and relations with the Iranian state. Kurdish groups are open to dialogue with all parties, including the MEK, to address Iran's future and Kurdish rights (Salih & Faris, 2023). However, the current government currently does not appear very amenable, for instance, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad requested the United Nations' help in "neutralizing Kurdish opposition groups" that are active within Iraq (*Iran Seeks UN Help To 'Disarm' Iraqi Kurdish Parties*, 2023).

Meanwhile, there is a possibility that the tensions between the KDP and Iran could be alleviated. However, certain issues, such as the growing gas industry and relations

with Turkey and the US, are likely to continue causing friction with Iran. Alongside their interactions with regional powers, the KRG, especially the KDP leadership, has shown a keen interest in fostering strong relationships with Arabian Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, that could further make reconciliation more difficult (Aziz, 2022).

Conclusion

The history of the KDP and other Kurdish political parties in the region is marked by complexities, prohibitions and challenges. The PYD, founded on the social and political heritage of the PKK, has pursued a unique approach to address the Kurdish people's rights and grievances, combining peaceful and armed means when appropriate. The Turkish operations, such as Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring, have caused major rifts among Kurdish political parties, and prominent Kurdish politicians in both factions have condemned the Turkish offensive. However, differing ideologies and alliances may pose significant challenges to finding a unified response to the crisis.

The political aspirations of various Kurdish parties within the diaspora continue to hold immense significance for both the immediate regions in which they operate and the broader Middle Eastern landscape. These distinct aspirations, driven by diverse ideologies, strategies and alliances, collectively contribute to shaping the future of the Kurdish people and their quest for autonomy, self-determination and recognition. The evolution of the PKK and its emphasis on democratic confederalism, alongside the YPG, mark a departure from previous armed struggle tactics. Conversely, the HDP seeks inclusivity and peaceful solutions, albeit with the challenge of reconciling its ties to Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK. In Syria, the PYD pursues autonomous governance and self-determination, influencing dynamics within the territories it controls, while the KNC navigates Syrian opposition bodies to represent Kurdish interests. Similarly, Komala demonstrates pragmatic collaboration within

alliances to advocate for Kurdish autonomy within Iran. These parties challenge existing nation-state systems and have the potential to redraw national boundaries. Furthermore, the divergent paths chosen by different Kurdish parties underscore the complexities of uniting a fragmented diaspora toward a common goal.

The future of the Kurdish diaspora lies in the delicate balance between peaceful negotiation and the legacies of armed struggle. As Kurdish parties engage in diplomatic initiatives, negotiate with host countries, and collaborate on international platforms, their actions shape the trajectory of a region grappling with identity, autonomy and stability.

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